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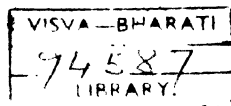
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The
LAST DAYS
of **PUSHKIN**

*From Unpublished
Contemporary Letters*

BY IRAKLY ANDRONIKOV



**FOREIGN LANGUAGES
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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN

BY IVY LITVINOVA

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A letter arrived at the editor's office of the monthly magazine *Novy Mir* (*The New World*). The name and address of the sender, inscribed on the envelope, were: Engineer N. S. Botashev. Nizhni Tagil. When the letter was opened, it was found to contain new material on the death of Pushkin, copies of extracts from contemporary correspondence, unpublished, which had been lying forgotten for over a hundred years. "The letters are at present in the Nizhni Tagil museum," wrote Engineer Botashev. "They were discovered in the home of an inhabitant of Tagil, whose relatives had been employed in the manager's office of the Demidov metal

works. The letters apparently came into their possession in the early twenties of the present century. The precise circumstances cannot be established, since the persons involved are no longer alive. The letters were discovered and acquired for the museum by my aunt, E. V. Botasheva."

The effect produced in the editor's office by this communication can easily be imagined.

The first thing to do was to acquaint experts on Pushkin with the material. Telephone calls were put in to the well-known Pushkin scholars, Tatyana Tsyavlovskaya and Professor Bondi. Their opinions were made known the very next day—the letters were genuine, the find of the greatest interest.

Before proceeding to publication, however, it was necessary to get a knowledge of them in their entirety, and to subject them to minute investigation.

It was decided to entrust the matter to me, and I went to Nizhni Tagil for this purpose in the company of members of the editorial staff.

We arrived at Tagil in the night, and put up at the hotel "Severnny Ural" ("North Urals"). The next morning Botashev came to the hotel to

see us. He is a man of thirty-five, an engineer at the New Tagil metal works. He combines his work as an engineer with regional research, is a student of the history of the Urals, and in 1953 brought out a book containing hitherto unknown facts drawn from the local archives on Kuznetsov, the self-taught serf who invented the rolling-mill, an astronomical clock, and a musical cabriolet.

The first things you notice about Nikolai Botashev are a pair of wide-open grey eyes looking at you through metal-rimmed glasses, and a neatly clipped reddish moustache.

After we had introduced ourselves and had a little talk, Botashev invited us to go with him to the museum, to visit his aunt Elizaveta and see the originals of the letters, to assure ourselves of their genuineness, and to learn the full history of their discovery.

The museum is situated in the left wing of an empire-style building with a white-pillared façade, reminiscent of the exquisite style of the 18th century Italian architect Rossi. The house formerly belonged to the Demidov family, wealthy Ural manufacturers, who owned millions of acres in the Urals, ore-bearing tracts,

copper and iron works, and fifteen thousand serfs. This empire-style mansion, once the premises of the Demidov offices, now houses the City Council, the archives, and the museum.

Wonderful town, Tagil! On the one hand there are 18th and 19th century buildings worthy of old Petersburg, specimens of provincial architecture, the usual wooden houses on stone foundations of the last century, all built on the same pattern and now dark with age; on the other, present-day Tagil, with the stacks of its powerful blast furnace, spidery cranes, mile-long fences surrounding factory territory, its palace of culture the like of which could not easily be found, streets recalling the new districts going up in Moscow, spacious food stores, motor-buses, traffic lights, newspaper show-cases, displaying the current issue of *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (*Literary Gazette*). . . . In the very middle of the town is the city square, now fragrant with purple lilac blossom and apple-trees in pink bloom.

These blossoming apple-trees, the luxuriant cones of the lilac, the gravelled walks, the benches, are right under the windows of our hotel room. And even before we made the

acquaintance of Botashev we had witnessed a marvellous scene—the pale dawn and, against the yellowing eastern sky, four tall chimneys, like four guns pointing heavenwards. . . . And then suddenly a fire! One half of the sky was covered with a red-gold glow. No alarm was raised, no one seemed to hurry. The town slept, the lilac blossomed, the sparrows chirped. The glow in the sky came from the burning slag spewed out by the blast furnaces and gradually died down.

.. Elizaveta Botasheva is a woman of middle height, her dark hair streaked with grey, her eyes alight with vitality. She is friendly, extraordinarily modest. Her post in the museum is that of librarian, but in fact she gives her whole soul to the museum itself. Every exhibit in it is alive for her, and she discourses marvellously about the Urals (probably totally unaware of this herself). So it was by no mere chance that Engineer Botashev went in for regional study—he inherited the taste for it from his aunt. Elizaveta Botasheva is herself a regional student by inheritance. Her grandfather, himself a student of the Urals district, was a friend of Mamin Sibiryak, the 19th century writer on Siberian life. The mansion in which the

museum is housed figures in one of Mamin-Sibiryak's novels about mine-owners, thus having its existence in literature as well as in the town. When Elizaveta Botasheva speaks of this she is talking history. This by the way is in the blood of Tagil dwellers—they are passionately devoted to their district and their town, they know the history of the Urals down to the smallest detail, glory in its resources, revel in its beauties.... And regional study is an honoured branch of science here.

The museum in Nizhni Tagil is worth a visit. The town has played an enormous part in the history of Russian industry and no small part in the history of Russian culture. And in the museum the well-known importance of Tagil takes shape, becomes actual, concrete. There are some wonderful things in it.

There is a model of the first Russian steam-engine, made in 1834 by self-taught Tagil serfs.

Then comes one of the first two-wheel, pedal-powered bicycles ever made—also the work of a serf. On this lofty velocipede with its huge front wheel, tiny back wheel, and pedals like door-steps, Artamonov is said to have pushed his way the 2,000 or so miles from the Urals

to Moscow, to attend the coronation of Alexander I.

Here is also to be found Kuznetsov's astronomical clock, made in 1775. It shows the hours and the minutes, the times of sunrise and sunset, the phases of the moon, the saints' days, according to their dates in the calendar, and strikes the hours, while a man with a hammer takes a red-hot mass of metal out of the furnace, lays it on an anvil, lets his hammer fall on it, and returns it once more to the furnace. •

A family of serf artists produced a Urals transparent lacquer not inferior to the Chinese lacquers. Many works by members of this family are to be found in the museum, but the most interesting are the paintings of one of them, showing the copper and iron mines, the rolling and sheet-iron shops of the Nizhni Tagil works. These pictures, which reveal the serf labour of the workers, were painted in 1835. Such themes were practically unique for the art of those days.

We admired the articles sent from the Nizhni Tagil works to the Moscow Industrial Exhibition of 1822—steel rods almost as thick as a man's arm, tied into knots, twisted into spirals, twined

into braids, by the cold process. One would think only an Atlas, holding up the heavens on his shoulders, could have performed such feats. But no—these were merely men from the Nishni Tagil works, men of ordinary stature but skilled craftsmen, ingenious inventors, veritable artists in their own line.

One more exhibit, discovered in 1946, while excavations were being made for the repair of the Visimo-Utkinsk dam, not far from Tagil, is worthy of mention.

A cast-iron cylinder was found attached by a chain to one of the submerged supports of this factory dam. When opened it was seen to contain a leaden cylinder, inside of which was a copper one. And in the copper cylinder there was a roll of factory documents for 1872. The documents were provided with a list of contents, headed with the words: "This information is intended to give a picture of the present state of the factories, to show to what an extent and in what way future generations have exceeded our attainments."

A wonderful discovery and a wonderful document! But then, there seems to be everything in the Tagil museum: portraits by the best artists of generations of the Demidovs (includ-

ing one of that Nikita Demidovich to whom Peter the Great gave a patent to exploit the mines in the High Mountain), a marble bust of Peter the Great, attributed to the famous sculptor Shubin, a portrait of the beautiful Aurora Demidova* by Bryullov; trays, caskets, tables coated with transparent lacquer, cast-iron art-moulds, ores and marbles, malachite and semi-precious stones, in which the soil of Tagil abounds; the products of Tagil factories, the portraits of many famous persons of our own times who came from Tagil; documents relating to Yakov Sverdlov, the leader of the revolutionary struggle of the Tagil Bolsheviks.

At last the time came for inspecting the Pushkin letters, for which purpose we went back to the library, the point at which our excursion had begun. Elizaveta Ivanovna brought out an album bound in crimson morocco embossed in gilt, with green ribbon book-marks; it was very old and its back was a little

* *Née* Schernwahl, married millionaire Demidov in 1836. When Demidov died, she married Andrei Karamzin, the recipient of the lately discovered letters, who resided in Tagil for a time to supervise the Demidov works. Hence, probably, the explanation of their being found in Tagil.—*Tr.*

ragged. When it was opened we saw that all the pages had been neatly cut away. In their place letters had been as neatly gummed, most of them in French, written on thin paper in various hands, but for the greater part in the same small, fine hand. In many places the ink had faded considerably.

It was a regular book—three hundred and forty pages of letters, all addressed to Andrei Karamzin in various towns in Europe, and all written in Petersburg between the years 1836 and 1837.

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In the spring of 1836 young officer of the Guards Andrei Karamzin (son of the celebrated historian the late Nikolai Karamzin) fell ill and on the advice of his doctors travelled in Germany, France and Italy. He stayed at Frankfurt and at Ems, rested for a time at Baden-Baden, saw the sights of Paris and Rome, while his relatives in Petersburg kept him well-posted in affairs at home. The most constant correspondent is his mother, Ekaterina Karamzina

(née Vyazemskaya). Another is his stepsister Sophia, the historian's daughter by a first marriage, known to literature for her friendship with the poets Zhukovsky, Pushkin and Lermontov, and other celebrities of the age. Somewhat less frequently writes a brother, Alexander Karamzin (Sashka), an officer of the Artillery Guards. There are also letters from a younger brother, Vladimir (Vosha, Voldemar), who is a student of St. Petersburg University, from Andrei's married sister Ekaterina Meshcherskaya, and from his younger sister, Elizaveta.

Constant visitors to the Karamzin salon include Madame Karamzina's brother, Pyotr Vyazemsky, poet and critic, the poet Zhukovsky, the novelist and dramatist Sollogub, Alexander Turgenev, collector of historical documents, and famed for his friendship with the most prominent Russian and foreign writers of his day. The opinions and greetings of all these are transmitted in the Karamzin letters, and every now and then some one or other of them adds a note.

The letters cover a period of one year and two months—the first in the album being dated 27th May, 1836, the last, 30th July, 1837. A

few pages, two or three letters, apparently belonging to June 1836, have been torn out of the album.

Before turning to the actual letters, a few words must be said regarding the Karamzins and their literary salon.

The Karamzin home was a centre of Russian culture both during the life of the historian, and after his death, in the thirties and forties of the 19th century. "All that there was of fame and talent in the capital," writes a contemporary, "assembled at the Karamzins' every night." "The whole of society thronged the Karamzin drawing-room," confirms another, noting at the same time that the house was open to the intelligentsia of the day. "Degrees in literary talent were issued there," writes a third.

The company in the Karamzin drawing-room reflected to a very great extent the social position of Nikolai Karamzin, historian, prominent writer and scholar, for his *History of the Russian State* appointed official historiographer to the Russian Empire and thus placed on a level with the highest state functionaries.

Poets, writers, musicians, scholars, courtiers, society beauties, diplomats, and the Hussar

partners at court balls of Sophia Karamzina visited the Karamzins.

It was a social and literary salon, but, unlike other houses in society, there was no card playing, and the Russian language was recognized.* People met at the Karamzins' for talk and exchange of ideas, and the subjects of their discussion were poetry, science, and politics.

The mistress of the salon was, of course, Madame Karamzina, widow of the historian. But its soul, its main personage and its best talker, was Sophia, the historian's daughter by a first marriage, who possessed the art of easy converse, and who was, as now appears, a talented letter-writer, capable of committing to paper with a light touch topics of the day, conversations, descriptions of individuals.

Andrei's brother Alexander only turned up occasionally—his service in the Artillery Guards imposing certain duties on him, the non-fulfilment of which, as shown in the letters, not infrequently landed him in the guard-room, where he employed his leisure in writing the most interesting and witty epistles, full of

* The language of the fashionable world was French, and many of the aristocracy learned to speak French before they spoke Russian.—*Tr.*

irony at the expense of high society, to his brother Andrei. Unlike his mother and step-sister he usually writes in Russian. Before Andrei went abroad, he and Alexander had served in the same battery; they had grown up together, Andrei being only a year older than Alexander (they were born in 1814 and 1815 respectively), they had friends in common, common literary interests; they both wrote and aspired to appear in print.

"Sashka," as Alexander's family called him, lived to the age of seventy-three, without, however, showing any special proof of his incontestable talent, which may be judged of from his letters. His name has remained in the annals of Russian culture thanks to some facetious lines written by the famous Russian poet Lermontov in Sophia Karamzina's album.

It has been no easy task to enumerate the letters found in Tagil. Almost every letter includes several quite separate ones. In the evening it is the mother who takes up the pen. After filling a couple of pages and wishing her beloved André good-night she goes to bed, and the next morning sister Sophie adds her own quota, sometimes three or four pages. Brother Alexander comes in, and there is another ad-

dition, sometimes quite lengthy. Then we see the handwriting of sister Ekaterina (Madame Meshcherskaya). And again comes the mother's handwriting. A letter is sometimes three days in process of completion. Alexander sends his brother letters he has been writing for several days, a page at a time—a sort of diary. How are such letters to be counted? Altogether there are a hundred and thirty-four individual letters in the album, not counting short added notes. It is impossible to make a more precise reckoning. •

The letters contain constant references to the Karamzins' broad circle of acquaintances, as well as detailed descriptions of society balls and court routs, literary readings, theatrical performances, and musical *soirées*. His relatives retail to Alexander all that they consider worthy of notice in Petersburg literary and social life. As well as this the whole life of the family, its affairs, intentions and preoccupations, is reflected.

Andrei is careless about his health, he allows himself an occasional glass of wine. This causes anxiety at home, his mother sends him a scolding.

He is extravagant, does not live within his

means. And his mother reminds him that they exist on a pension gained for them by the merits of his virtuous father.

The small country estate in Arzamas District brings in very little. The village elder does not obey orders. The steward writes that Madame Karamzina will soon have to receive a delegation of peasants—twenty rebels who are coming to Petersburg to seek her protection (against herself!). Recruiting for the army is going on and the instigators are to be handed over for soldiers. But will this be enough to restore order? An adviser is required, money is required. Alexander ignores these questions.

There is new wall-paper in the drawing-room—one half will be blue, the other half yellow. Andrei must be informed of this. Ekaterina Andreyevna has been presented by Klementi Rosset with a steel pen: this letter is written with it, and she thinks it writes very nicely.

Andrei moves to Paris, and his mother hastens to give her son advice—he must be sure to visit the salon of the famous Madame Recamier, where writers of all tendencies assemble. Madame Svechina, who had long ago left Russia, on becoming a convert to Catholicism, was on friendly terms with Madame Recamier. Her

salon, too, is influential in Paris, many celebrities visit it. Alexander Turgenev "greatly regrets that he is not in Paris, and cannot introduce you to Madame Recamier, you really ought to try to get to know her, if only through Madame Svechina," writes Madame Karamzina.

A letter to Madame Recamier from Alexander Turgenev, who has just returned to Russia after a five years' stay abroad, is enclosed, recommending to her notice the son of the famous Karamzin.

In Paris Andrei goes to balls and the theatre. Sophia considers it her duty to repeat to him the "just remarks of Vyazemsky [her Uncle]," who says that this is "amusing, but not improving. In Paris one should acquaint oneself with the arts and sciences, and cultivate celebrities, *les hommes d'époque*."

Andrei always writes his letters in French. His mother is not pleased with this. She appeals to the authority of Zhukovsky, who adds a note in Russian to a letter dated 25th December, 1836:

"It has been resolved here by a majority of votes at an extraordinary session of the family and friends, that you—the eldest and worthy son of Nikolai Karamzin—should write your

letters in Russian, and not in French. This session was attended by your two sisters, your only mother, and myself, your intimate friend. The maternal vote, which I consider as equal to five, was given for the Russian language, and mine also—six votes altogether; Sophia, true to her laudable habit of frivolity, stood up for the French language. Your sister Ekaterina saw fit, with her usual moderation, to steer a middle course. I beg you to submit to this ruling, and, in addition, not to forget me, even though you are in Paris, and not to tremble too much at the thought of me when you hear the discussions of liberals and others. I embrace you and love you as my own soul.”

Zhukovsky dines quite casually at the Karamzins', without waiting for an invitation. Alexander Turgenev meets them almost every day, either in their own home, or at the Vyazemskys', or at the Meshcherskys', both of which houses are connected with the Karamzin house by close family ties.

The friends of the late historian, in their youth members of the “Arzamas” progressive literary society, but by the thirties occupying important government and diplomatic posts, continue to visit the Karamzin home. When it

is remembered that the most intimate friends of the Karamzins—Vyazemsky, Zhukovsky, Alexander Turgenev and Pushkin—were also once active members of this literary society, uniting, as it did, the literary followers of the historian, the name “The Arzamas Ark” given to the Karamzin salon by a familiar, will be quite comprehensible.

From the Tagil letters we learn of the official and literary affairs of the novelist V. Sollogub, a friend of the Karamzin brothers. Sophia Karamzina makes the acquaintance of the poetess Countess Rostopchina and gives Andrei a fairly accurate description of her. Alexander initiates his brother into the publishing plans of Vyazemsky and Odoyevsky, who intend to bring out a magazine of their own, running counter to Pushkin's *Sovremennik*.

Andrei takes an interest in everything to be seen and heard in Petersburg. His mother (in a letter of 29th September, 1836) writes that everyone spending the summer at Tsarskoye Selo, “from courtiers to the lowest of the low,” had gone to see the trials of the steam-drawn coaches as they passed by on their way to Pavlovsk. The train comprised four carriages, coupled in pairs.

"Each carriage," writes Madame Karamzina, "has two sections—one closed, the other open. There was no steam yet, so two carriages at a time were drawn by two horses, harnessed in single file. In each train, consisting of two carriages, were about a hundred persons. The horses galloped. These trials were arranged to show the convenience and ease of this form of traffic. They say that by the middle of October everything will be ready and the trains will be drawn by steam. *C'est bien intéressant*. It made a beautiful picture—the weather was fine, the two paths leading to the railway were thronged with spectators. There was quite a crowd, a most unusual phenomenon for us. They say the Moscow merchants are earnestly petitioning the Tsar to let them build a railway from Petersburg to Moscow at their own expense. . . ."

There are still more interesting items of information. In a letter begun on the 5th of June, 1836, Sophia Karamzina writes that "Gogol read his comedy *Marriage*" on "Paul's birthday" at the Vyazemskys'. "We laughed till we cried," writes Sophia, "for he reads

* Evidently the Tsar took a long time thinking it over. The railway was not built till 1851.—*Tr.*

marvellously. But all his works have one and the same defect—lack of inventiveness in the plot and monotony in the jokes which are always vulgar and trivial. But still he has the true Russian spirit, without the slightest admixture of the European. He is leaving with Aunt (Vyazemskaya) today, and hopes to see you in Ems.”

The opinion of Sophia that the plot of *Marriage* showed lack of inventiveness was shared by many at that time. But Sophia speaks not of *Marriage* alone. In reproaching the author of *The Inspector-General* with lack of inventiveness she shows that she has entirely failed to understand what is new in Gogol's plays, even though in her last sentence she notes the national character of the play, its “Russian spirit, without the slightest admixture of the European.”

Four days later, on the 6th of June, Gogol, with Vyazemsky's wife and daughter, went aboard a steamer to go abroad, seen off by Pyotr Vyazemsky.

“There is a great deal of talk about Glinka's opera, with which the season at the *Grand Théâtre*, after its reconstruction, is to be opened,” writes Alexander Karamzin in a

letter dated 5th November, 1836. "They say it's very good. Vielgorsky is enthusiastic about this opera, considers it a remarkable work of art. Unfortunately, they say it will be impossible to get a seat for the first performance, which will be given at the end of the month."

The Karamzin letters convey the atmosphere in which preparations for the first performance of Glinka's opera went on. Vielgorsky was a statesman, patron of art and composer. He had an apartment in the Karamzin mansion and, returning from the Winter Palace or a concert, frequently looked in at the Karamzins', where the guests always stayed till late at night.

"Yesterday, Thursday, the *Grand Théâtre*, which is now very handsome, reopened," writes Sophia Karamzina on the 28th of November, 1836, "Glinka's *Ivan Susanin* was given. The court, the whole *corps diplomatique*, and all the bigwigs were there. I was in the box of sweet Madame Shevich, of course we were unable to get one for ourselves. Some of the arias in this opera are exquisite, but on the whole it struck me as rather too plaintive, monotonous and ineffective—all Russian motifs and all in minor keys. The Kremlin in the last act is splendid—the crowd on the stage imper-

ceptibly merging into the figures drawn on the backdrop, and fading away in perspective. The enthusiasm, as always here, was decidedly chilly, the applause kept dying down and breaking out again, each time with an obvious effort."

Sophia liked the scenery a great deal better than she did Glinka's music. the beauty of which she was incapable of appreciating.

The first performance of *Ivan Susanin* evoked conflicting opinions and violent argument. Pushkin, Gogoľ, Zhukovsky, Odoyevsky, Viazemsky, Vielgorsky were enthusiastic about Glinka's opera—the aristocracy slated it. Bulgarin* wrote an embittered and ignorant article about it. But some steered a middle course of condescending approval. The Tsar attended the first performance; he applauded the opera, and it seems to have been by his order that the title was changed to *Life for the Tsar*. So the condescending praise must have expressed the opinion of official circles, and Sophia Karamzina's attitude may be put down to the reception given to the opera in the box

* *Bulgarin, F. B.* (1789-1859)—reactionary writer and critic.—*Tr.*

of "sweet Madame Shevich," who was own sister to Chief of Secret Police Benckendorff. It is noteworthy that Sophia Karamzina calls the opera *Ivan Susanin*. This is further corroboration of the fact that society did not immediately take to the title *Life for the Tsar*, so alien to the spirit of the opera.

Chaadayev's famous *Philosophical Letter*,* in the magazine *Telescope* in September 1836, with its severe criticism of the actual state of affairs in Russia and its pessimistic view both of the historic past of the Russian people, and of their future, was interpreted in the Karamzin home as nothing but an insult to national pride. Sophia Karamzina attacks Chaadayev, is indignant with the censor for passing his article. This attitude, it is true, in no way conflicts with the reception given to Chaadayev's *Letter* in the Winter Palace. The criticism of serfdom and the autocracy infuriated the Tsar. In order to soften the effect produced by the *Letter* in society, Nicholas I declared Chaadayev insane and put him under medical observation.

* *Chaadayev, P. Y.* (1794-1856)—idealist philosopher, a friend of Pushkin.—*Tr.*

It is, however, characteristic that Alexander Karamzin, emphasizing precisely that part of the *Letter* which contains a criticism of the actual state of Russian society, expresses his agreement with it.

"Philosophy is the worst feature of our century," he writes, beginning his letter in Russian, and in his usual ironical tone. "We philosophize about the way we spend our time, the ignoble way our youth is passing, how degraded we have become, the noticeable blunting of feeling, our striking resemblance to a block of wood, and so on. . . . This philosophy granted, something beastly begins to invade our spirits, something which gradually turns into drowsiness, we start yawning, and at last lie down and fall to snoring. And the next day—confined to barracks. The sight of the beastliness everywhere is enough to drive one mad, even to make one write a letter like Chaadayev's, which our sister has written to you about. Some of the ideas in this man's rigmarole really have something in them, you know," he admits, going on, however, to reject Chaadayev's attitude, which he rightly considers false. "Chaadayev," asserts Karamzin, "takes the specific features of a particular period for

the general character of the people, and abuses poor Russia, when it is the age itself, the whole of humanity, that should be abused."



But the real importance of the Tagil find is not in such individual judgements on Gogol's comedies, Glinka's opera, Chaadayev's *Letter*, and so on.

There were ancient ties of friendship between the Karamzin family and Pushkin, who had been on an intimate footing with the historian and his wife while still at the *Lycée*.* When Pushkin was threatened with exile to Siberia or Solovki, the old Karamzin joined with Zhukovsky in pleading for him.

The writers among whom Pushkin's literary views were formed regarded Karamzin as their teacher. Pushkin had the utmost respect for him both as a scholar and an individual. Karam-

* *Lycée*—privileged school for children of the nobility. The Tsarskoselsky *Lycée* was founded in 1811.—*Tr.*

zin was the first person in Russia to raise the authority and reputation of the writer to a high level. Pushkin was attracted by Karamzin's lofty spirit of independence, his utter lack of trivial ambition, the breadth of his views, his steadfast adherence to principle and his conscientiousness as a scholar whose works were infinitely broader than his conceptions, based as the latter were on acceptance of the autocracy and the state of serfdom of the peasantry. Pushkin dedicated *Boris Godunov* to the "memory of Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin, so precious to Russians."

In his youthful years Pushkin had cherished a profound affection for Madame Karamzina. A frequenter of the Karamzin home wrote of her: "If a Christian thought could have flashed through the brain of the heathen Phidias, and he had sought to sculpture a Madonna, he would undoubtedly have endowed her with the features of Madame Karamzina in her youth." She was nineteen years older than Pushkin; when he first made her acquaintance she was already thirty-six. The late Y. Tynyanov, who has done excellent research work on the biography and poetry of Pushkin, suggests in his novel *Pushkin* that the poet preserved his feeling for her to

the end of his life, and the Karamzin letters go far to confirm this. R. Edeling, who knew Pushkin well, called Madame Karamzina "the object of his earliest and noblest affections."

Pushkin became a constant visitor to the Karamzins' after his return from enforced residence on his mother's estate in 1827, when the historian was no longer alive. To this year belong two poems dedicated respectively to Sophia and Madame Karamzina.

At first he visited the Karamzins alone, but from 1831 he went there with his wife, and later on with her sisters as well.

The importance of everything said by the Karamzins not only about Pushkin but about their other friends, too, becomes obvious when it is realized that practically all the friends of the Karamzins were also the friends of Pushkin. But the importance of the letters is enhanced still more by the fact that the Karamzins knew all about Pushkin's domestic affairs. The tragedy went on under their very eyes. It was in their house that Pushkin met George d'Anthès.* They, among other intimate friends of the poet, re-

* D'Anthès, adopted son of Heckeren, Dutch envoy to Russia. Pushkin met his death in a duel with d'Anthès.—*Tr.*

ceived by post anonymous letter, intolerably insulting to Pushkin. The Karamzins took an active part in the attempts to soften the conflict between Pushkin and d'Anthès in November 1836. We will, however, not anticipate the events related in such detail in the letters to Andrei Karamzin. The biographers of Pushkin have always known that these letters must have existed in their time, through Andrei Karamzin's answers to them from Paris, Rome and Baden-Baden, addressed to his mother, sisters and brother Alexander, which contain brilliant descriptions of his travels, and replies to the communication of his relatives, including many remarks about Pushkin. Andrei Karamzin's letters were preserved by the descendants of his sister Ekaterina Meshcherskaya, and appeared in print shortly before the Revolution.

As we have seen, the letters to Andrei Karamzin were probably carried by the latter to Tagil when he went there to supervise the vast property left by his wife's first husband, the millionaire Demidov.

In 1939 there died in Tagil P. Shamarin, an eighty-four-year-old mine-surveyor who had worked in the manager's office of the Demidov

works before the October Revolution. After his death the album in the rubbed morocco binding, with gilt embossments and green book-marks, was found by his niece, a bookkeeper in the Tagil mine-management, amongst old books, supplements to *The Niva*,* and other chance objects. Opening it she saw that there were old letters written in French glued in place of the original pages. She showed her find to Elizaveta Botasheva, and that is how the letters came into the keeping of the Tagil museum. But this happened during the war.

The first thing to do was to find out what was in the letters. The then director of the museum Nadezhda Grushina gave orders for the letters to be translated into Russian. This work was done by Olga Poltoratskaya, a doctor in a sanatorium for tubercular diseases, evacuated to Tagil from Leningrad for the duration of the war, who knew French perfectly well.

As soon as the contents of the letters had been mastered, everyone concerned was finally convinced of their value. It was then that N. Botashev interested himself in the find. He

* Nineteenth century popular-literary magazine.—*Tr.*

made extracts from the Russian translation of everything relating to Pushkin, and sent them, with brief explanatory comments, to *Novy Mir*.

After the war Dr. Poltoratskaya retired on pension and went to live in the country not far from Moscow, where I visited her. She told me that the museum had only asked her to give them a report on the basis of which the contents of the letters could be adjudged, and that she had not undertaken to make a full and exact translation of all the letters. In a word, her translation did not contain the whole text, and before publishing it checking with the originals would be necessary.

This was done. The Karamzin letters were studied anew. The extracts sent by Engineer Botashev were expanded to include everything referring to Pushkin, from important information to the merest mention of his name, and the new material, with an introductory article and explanatory notes by myself, appeared in the first issue of *Novy Mir* for 1956, under the title *Extracts from the Karamzin Letters*.

THE LETTERS



The first letter is dated 27th May, 1836. The names of George d'Anthès (the man who killed Pushkin in a duel), the Goncharov sisters (Pushkin married Natalya Goncharova), the Meshcherskys (Madame Karamzina's eldest daughter Ekaterina married Pierre Meshchersky), Prince Vyazemsky (brother of Madame Karamzina) already begin to crop up. We plunge straight into the circle of individuals whom Pushkin met constantly.

Sophia Karamzina writes to Andrei of her stepbrother Sashka (Alexander), who had been entertaining her for the last few days "with his charming face and amusing pranks."

"He left us on Sunday evening," she writes. "G. D. [George d'Anthès] has gone, too, to Krasnoye, they have drill for days on end.

"Dear [Uncle] Vyazemsky comes to see us every day, Aunt is unwell, her leg hurts.

D'Anthès has not turned up again, we only know of his existence from a jar of Paris pomatum which he sent. Yesterday was Pierre's [Meshchersky's] birthday. His brothers, [Pyotr] Vyazemsky, and Maltsov, came to dinner.... Today we are going riding after dinner with the Goncharovs, Balabin and Maltsov. Then there'll be tea at Ekaterina's, she's giving a party for Alexandrina Trubetskaya, with whom Venevitinov, Maltsov and Nikolai Meshchersky are in love. Tomorrow everybody is going by omnibus to Pargolovo...."

This is typical of the whole correspondence—detailed information as to the health of relatives (Aunt Vyazemskaya's leg hurts), who is in love with whom, who visits them, who invites them to dinner....

Almost as constant visitors as Pyotr Vyazemsky, who goes to the Karamzins' every day, are the Meshcherskys: Ekaterina and her husband Pyotr (or Pierre, as he is called in the letters to avoid confusion with Pyotr Vyazemsky, usually referred to as Prince Vyazemsky). On the occasion of Pierre Meshchersky's birthday, his brothers Nikolai and Sergei have been invited to dinner, as well as his cousin Ivan Maltsov, one of the young men who participated

in a well-known literary-philosophical circle of the 'twenties and helped to found the *Moskorsky Vestnik* magazine. Afterwards, serving under the poet Griboyedov when the latter was envoy to Persia, Maltsov was the sole survivor of the destruction of the Russian mission in Tehran. A millionaire, Maltsov was at this time meditating the foundation of a textile mill in Petersburg. He was famed as a *raconteur*. At the time when we find him in the Karamzin home, he was about twenty-nine.

Ivan Balabin, another member of the after-dinner cavalcade, is a Horse Guards officer, a friend of d'Anthès and the Karamzin brothers. He is one of those Balabins in whose home Gogol was employed as a tutor. The party is given by Ekaterina Meshcherskaya in honour of Princess Alexandrina Trubetskaya, A. Venetinov, Maltsov, and Nikolai Meshchersky, who are all in love with her. Sophia Karamzina is dying to know which of them the Princess will marry. In 1837 her curiosity was satisfied—the Princess Trubetskaya gave the preference to Meshchersky.

Brother Alexander and d'Anthès are encamped at Krasnoye Selo near Petersburg; they are spoken of as martyrs.

The excursion to Pargolovo came off. And d'Anthès took part in it, too. Sophia found it very amusing. Princess Butera, the owner of Shuvalovo, a suburban estate, allowed the company to use her house. They dined in her splendid dining-room. The wine "flowed freely." Maltsov "sparkled indefatigably." On the way home they stopped to take tea at the estate of Princess Odoyevskaya, wife of the well-known writer, who was an old friend of the Karamzins.

3rd June, 1836. Alexander Karamzin writes:

"The Cavaliers Gardes only arrived at Krasnoye today, and d'Anthès has already been to see us twice."

Two days later Madame Karamzina tells her son the same news: d'Anthès had gone to Krasnoye to visit Alexander. They are fascinated by d'Anthès, completely sharing the attitude of Petersburg society to him, and considering that he thoroughly deserves the attention paid to him at court. He enjoys the good graces of the Tsar, of the patroness of the Guard, the Tsaritsa herself, and is on friendly terms with the Crown Prince, with whom he goes out riding.

"Our life goes on as usual, dear Andrei," writes his stepsister on the 5th of June. "We have visitors every evening. D'Anthès comes

almost every day. He is disgusted at the regiment being turned out for military drill twice a day (the Grand-Duke considers the Guards don't know how to sit on horseback) but he is as jolly and witty as ever, and finds time to take part in our cavalcades. . . ."

Sophia, not suspecting the role the beauteous Aurora Schernwahl was to play in Andrei Karamzin's life, writes to her stepbrother:

"I have to inform you of a *very rich wedding*—Mademoiselle Aurora Schernwahl is going to marry that Croesus Paul Demidov. What a difference from the modest fate in store for her if she had married Mukhanov."

Aurora Schernwahl's former *fiancé*, Alexander Mukhanov, a hard-up young officer, neither belonging to the aristocracy, nor possessing the fantastic wealth of Demidov, but a contributor to literary magazines, and considered by his friends a "man of great promise," was a warm admirer of Pushkin and a friend of the Karamzins and Vyazemsky. He died young, a short time before his wedding was to have taken place. His brothers Nikolai and Vladimir were also warm admirers of Pushkin and occasionally met the Karamzin family.

The 1st of July—the name-day of the Tsar-

itsa—was a traditional holiday in Peterhof. Sophia went to the celebrations in the train of Madame Shevich. A letter dated 8th July, 1836 is devoted to a description of the day's proceedings.

"...The festivities began at eight in the morning. I spent the first few hours drearily enough in the most boring company, strolling up and down the alleys. . . . The only agreeable moment came when everyone went into the grounds and walked about after presentation to His Majesty. I saw almost all my friends and acquaintances there, including [Uncle] Vyazemsky (he seemed quite at home in his court uniform, which he at last brought himself to wear), the Odoyevskys (he in his uniform and she all in pink, with field flowers in her hair, very thin, but almost beautiful), Nadine Sollogub (who is going abroad with her aunt on the 11th, and will stay away over a year; in the winter she may go to Italy, but now she is going straight to Baden-Baden, where she hopes to see you. Madame Smirnova is already in Baden. (Oh my poor André—mind you don't lose your heart!) The Opochinins and Lutzerodes (who all send their love), the Buturlins (they are leaving on the 25th. Liza was charming in *une couronne de roses pâles*), and d'Anthès. I

confess I was very glad to see him. Somehow you grow fond of those whom you meet every day. . . . He asked me who I had come with and what I intended to do. He dropped a contemptuous "What—with her?" but just the same was very courteous to Madame Shevich. I introduced him to her and he asked to be allowed to escort us on the evening promenade, to which she consented very willingly, having up till then done nothing but ask (to my intense annoyance): "I'm afraid we shan't be able to go to the illuminations without any cavaliers, our cavaliers have deserted us—hasn't anyone seen our cavaliers?" And when asked, "Who exactly?" she replied, "Pishchevich and Zolotnitsky." You can imagine how ashamed I felt. Look whom we had placed our hopes on, and even they had disappointed us!"

Pishchevich and Zolotnitsky, whom Madame Shevich, sister of the chief of police, awaited so anxiously, were the nephews of the chief of police. It was not, however, this fact which upset Sophia Karamzina. She considered the young men not presentable enough to escort her and Madame Shevich to the illuminations, where the whole court would be present.

The names of Pishchevich and Zolotnitsky

crop up frequently in the Karamzin letters, but this in itself would not be sufficient grounds for dwelling on them, if they had not both contributed to Pushkin's magazine *Sovremennik* (*Contemporary*).

After strolling about the grounds, and going with Madame Shevich to hear the evening tattoo, Sophia again met a number of acquaintances who were assembling for the fancy dressball:

"We met d'Anthès again. After this he never left our side. We took with us your unlucky friend Alexander Golitsin (very melancholy about his trouble in the service), Charles Rosset, Polikarpov, and the notorious Zolotnitsky who at last discovered us and never left his aunt's side the whole evening. . . . D'Anthès gave me his arm and kept me amused with his jokes and gaiety, and even with his extremely comic passionate outbursts (all with regard to the beautiful Natalie*). . . ."

The persons glimpsed in the crowd of courtiers and mentioned in this letter were friends of Pushkin. Pyotr Vyazemsky (Madame Karamzina's brother) was an old friend of Pushkin and a poet and critic. He passed for a liberal,

* Pushkin's wife.—*Tr.*

was dismissed from government service in the twenties and kept under police surveillance. At that time he had been one of Pushkin's literary adherents. But by the 'thirties his liberalism had become dimmed, his views modified. His acceptance in the government service was followed by promotion to the rank of Chamberlain. At first Vyazemsky professed indifference to court rank, and this was the first time he had put on his official uniform. By 1840 he had quite given up the ideas of his youth and joined the foes of progress, and democracy. Sophia Karamzina's letter marks the critical moment of Vyazemsky's gradual surrender to the atmosphere of political reaction.

Vladimir Odoyevsky, author and critic, musician and scholar, was closely connected with Pushkin as contributor to the latter's magazine *Sovremennik*.

Nadine Sollogub was a cousin of the writer Vladimir Sollogub. A beauty. A maid of honour. Pushkin greatly admired her and wrote a poem to her in 1832.

Pushkin was not present at the festivities. He avoided court ceremonies, although his rank of *Kammer-Junker* obliged him to attend.

Sophia Karamzina writes to Alexander of

d'Anthès' feelings for Pushkin's wife, as a thing he knows all about. Indeed, d'Anthès' passion was by now the subject of general discussion in Petersburg society. Everyone knew that d'Anthès was sure to turn up wherever Madame Pushkina was, that he went riding with her and her sister Ekaterina Goncharova, that d'Anthès and Baron Heckeren, the Dutch ambassador, whose adopted son he was, had formerly frequented Pushkin's house, but that after the rumours of his attentions to Madame Pushkina got about Pushkin had stopped receiving them. All this must have been well known to Alexander Karamzin before he went abroad. D'Anthès' "comic passionate outbursts" with regard to Pushkin's wife! Sophia Karamzina could find them comic. They could still amuse her. She could see no harm in them.



24th July, 1836. Sophia to Andrei Karamzin.

"The second number of *Sovremennik* is out, but is said to be quite dull, and there is

not a line in it by Pushkin (upon whom Bulgarin casts the *just* and terrible imputation that he is a 'star, turning pale at midday'). It's appalling to have to agree that a Bulgarin, in his desire to vent his spite on Pushkin, can wound him no worse than by saying the truth. There are some witty articles by Vyazemsky, one by the way on *The Inspector-General*. But no one but a reckless, lazy creature like Pushkin would include scenes from Andrei Muravyov's fiasco, *Tiveriadi*. . . ."

Sophia Karamzina's appraisal of Pushkin's magazine *Sovremennik*—an unfavourable opinion coming from the house of his friends—affords eloquent testimony to the loneliness of Pushkin.

Alexander Karamzin does not agree with her. After reading his sister's letter, he adds:

"Don't believe what Sophia has just written to you about *Sovremennik*—it's a very good number. True, there's nothing by Pushkin in it, but there are fine articles by Uncle Pyotr, and by Odoyevsky. Pushkin is going to bring out his new novel in it."

The reference is to Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*.

Pushkin himself considered the second number of *Sovremennik* very good, and it is possible that Alexander Karamzin's opinions are the echo of Pushkin's, for Alexander met him frequently. A fortnight later Alexander tells his brother about his own literary affairs and offers advice:

"...Don't forget to write something for Odoyevsky's magazine, since anyhow our name adorns the prospectus, amidst those of Messrs Tyapkin, Fityulkin, and Co. I have still more trouble with my prose than with verse. I have sold nothing, which means I shall not get paid anywhere, but I do not lose heart..."

Alexander Karamzin refers to the "encyclopaedic and eclectic" *Severny Zritel* (*North-ern Observer*) which Odoyevsky and Krayevsky propose bringing out early in 1837.

Just when Pushkin had begun the publication of his *Sovremennik* (which was to come out every quarter), Odoyevsky and Krayevsky, while close contributors in this magazine, were planning a monthly of their own. They hoped to get on their editorial staff both contributors to *Sovremennik* and Pushkin's theoretical opponents, first and foremost the group of reactionary writers in *Moscow Observer*.

The censor Uvarov, detesting Pushkin and regarding this proposal as detrimental to *Sovremennik*, supported Pushkin's rivals, whose monthly was by no means planned in the spirit of *Sovremennik*, but, as they wrote in their application, "in the spirit of the benevolent solicitude of the government for education in Russia."

Andrei and Alexander Karamzin had put their names on the "list of those desirous of participating in the publication of *Severnny Zritel*, which accounts for Alexander's reminding his brother of Odoyevsky's magazine.

Before going any further it must be mentioned that the Pushkins had taken a country-house in the neighbourhood of Petersburg on the Kamenny Ostrov for the summer of 1836, while the Karamzins spent the summer in Tsarskoye Selo, quite near. Despite this they only heard about the Pushkin family through mutual friends. The 30th of August being the occasion of family festivities, the Meshcherskys and Arkadi Rosset, a colleague and intimate friend of the Karamzin brothers, dined at Tsarskoye Selo. Nikolai and Vladimir Mukhanov—the sisters' friends—came in after dinner.

"The elder," writes Alexander Karamzin from Petersburg (31st August, in Russian), "is rather fat and looks like his late brother;* he isn't good-looking, but he is very talkative, gay and sociable. The younger, on the contrary, is like nothing on earth—skinny, unpleasant, taciturn. . . .

"The elder had seen Pushkin the day before, in very low spirits, regretting he had written his revengeful lampoon, and sighing for his lost popularity. Pushkin showed him a poem he had just written, complaining of the fickleness and frivolity of the public, and reminding it of his services. Mukhanov says it's a lovely thing."

The first reference is, of course, to the *Ode on the Recovery of Lucullus*, published at the end of 1835 in *Moscow Observer* causing Pushkin grave unpleasantness in 1836. In the heir of the wealthy Lucullus, stealing wood that belongs to the state, everyone recognized Uvarov, Minister for Education, who lodged a complaint against Pushkin to the Tsar.

The Tsar ordered Chief of Police Benckendorff to administer a sharp reproof to Pushkin.

* Aurora's Schernwahl former betrothed, who died.—*Tr.*

Matters were complicated by the fact that Uvarov was head of the censorship and Pushkin was at his mercy. It was in this very month of August that Uvarov supported Odoyevsky's and Krayevsky's application for permission to publish a magazine which was bound to undermine the literary and financial resources of *Sovremennik*. Three days before Mukhanov's meeting with Pushkin, the censor had prohibited an article by Pushkin in *Sovremennik*. This was another of the causes of that depressed state of which Mukhanov told Alexander, and Alexander wrote to his brother. Pushkin's affairs were in such a bad state that he had been compelled to raise money from a pawnbroker on his silverware.

The new poem which Pushkin read to Mukhanov on the 29th of August, in which he says he has raised himself a "monument not made by hands" dates from a day or two before (it is inscribed "21st August, 1836, Kamenny Ostrov"). Mukhanov's words are further proof that Pushkin wrote this poem not for his own glorification, but in reply to attacks by reactionary critics and the section of the public in agreement with the statement that Pushkin was a "star turning pale at midday." Mukhanov's

interpretation of the poem is crude—the *Monument* is not a complaint of the world's ingratitude. Professor Tsyavlovskaya is right in considering that Pushkin, as he frequently did in similar situations, used the desire to hit back at his literary critics as an excuse. Pushkin had written a poem full of profound philosophical significance. His reflections on the role and merits of the poet are addressed not to critics and not to those of the public who had turned cold to him, not to his own times, but to the reader of the future, who will appreciate the poet's achievements and their significance.

"Speaking of Pushkin," continues Alexander Karamzin, "Voshka [youngest brother Vladimir], Arkadi and I, after all sorts of delays, set off on the evening of Natalya's name-day on a *partie de plaisir* to the Pushkins at their country-house. Passing by the Zagryazhskaya* house, which was all lit up, we remembered Madame Zagryazhskaya had Furtz with her, and that the Pushkins would most likely be there.

"Despite this, we continued on our distant

* Madame (Natalya) Zagryazhskaya was the great-aunt of Pushkin's wife, Natalya and her sisters, and her house was lit up in honour of St. Natalya.—*Tr.*

journey, and arrived just in time to see these ladies in their best dresses, and hand them into their carriage."

The attempt of the young men to call on the Pushkins did not end with this.

"After another excursion a day or two ago, we returned covered with confusion. On the appointed day we set off on our distant journey, once more driving through the cold, dark night, listening for nearly an hour to the wind from the north, and every now and then catching sight of the distant lights twinkling from the houses of country-lovers in the woods. We arrived—'Natalya Nikolayevna [Madame Pushkina] is sorry, but she is very unwell and cannot receive visitors.' Wrathful exclamations and expletives issued from our manly bosoms," continues Alexander, now writing in French. "We consigned all women dwelling on islands and falling ill at inconvenient moments, to the devil and returned home still more embarrassed than we had been the first time. And that is all our visits have come to so far. But for that most accommodating illness, the Pushkins would have come to Tsarskoye and spent yesterday and the day before there."

This is a reference to Alexander's own name-

day, the 30th of August, to which the Pushkins had not come.

"Their absence," writes Alexander further on, "greatly rejoiced my meek dove, who desired to reign without rivals, especially on the solemn name-day of my saint. But fate mocked at her joy and turned against her own bosom the cruel and inhuman wishes she had harboured for the pains in the Pushkins' bowels." •

The ironical soubriquet "meek dove" applies to Madame Sheyich's daughter Alexandrina, to whom Alexander was paying half-serious attentions. "Extremely plain," as a contemporary calls her, she could not hope to rival Madame Pushkina and was delighted that the latter did not come. But Mademoiselle Shevich was punished for this delight—Natalya Stroganova, a lady who enjoyed great social success, came in the place of Madame Pushkina and distracted Alexander Karamzin's attention from herself.

A note of 3rd September tells of yet another journey to Kamenny Ostrov:

"Last night Volodka and I," writes Alexander (in Russian again), "went to call once more on the Pushkins and it was funnier than ever. We

were informed that nobody was at home, they had gone to the theatre. But this time we did not give up our enterprise so lightly, we went in, ordered lamps to be lit, opened the clavecin, sang a little, took up some books, read, and spent an hour and a quarter in this fashion. At last they came back. They may have slept in the carriage, anyhow they arrived in a very drowsy state. Alexandrina did not come into the room, but went straight to bed: Pushkin said a word or two and went to bed. The other two [Pushkin's wife and her sister Ekaterina] came in to us, yawning, and began imploring us to go, for they were longing to go to bed, but we declared that we would force them to stay with us as long as we had stayed without them. And we really did stay over an hour. Pushkina could not hold out so long, and after we met her requests for us to go with a refusal, went away before we did. But Goncharikha [Ekaterina] sat out the whole hour and a quarter, though she almost went to sleep on the sofa. And so we parted, swearing that if they wanted to see us again they would have to send a carriage for us. Pushkina told me to tell you that she *sends you a kiss* (her own words)."



On the 17th of September the Karamzins celebrated Sophia's name-day at Tsarkoye Selo.

"We expected a great many guests from town, and Mama was rather nervous," writes Sophia two days later. "But everything went off very well, and the dinner was splendid. Among the guests were Pushkin and his wife, the Goncharovs (all three sisters were brilliant in their youth, their beauty and their slender waists), my brothers, d'Anthès, A. Golitsin, Arkadi and Charles Rosset (they lost Klementi in town, in the bustle of getting away), Skalon, Sergei Meshchersky, Paul and Nadine Vyazemsky (Aunt stayed in Petersburg to wait for Uncle, but he didn't come back from Moscow after all) and Zhukovsky. You can easily imagine that when the time came round for toasts at dinner, we did not forget to drink your health. The hours after dinner seemed to us very short in this delightful company. The neighbours began coming at nine—Lily Zakharzhevskaya, the Sheviches, Lydia Bludova, the

Trubetskys, Countess Stroganova, Princess Dolgorukova, the Klyupfels, the Baratynskys, Zolotnitsky, one of the Princesses Baryatinsky, and Count Mikhail Vielgorsky—and so we were able to have a proper ball and everyone seemed to be having a good time, to judge by the faces, except Pushkin who was sad, thoughtful and preoccupied the whole evening. His dejection made me dejected, too. His roving, wild, abstracted gaze was continually fixing itself, in defiant anxiety, on his wife and d'Anthès, who is still up to his old tricks. Though he never left Ekaterina's side for a moment, he kept casting passionate glances at Natalie from a distance, and in the end danced the mazurka with her, after all. Pushkin's face was a pitiable sight, he stood in the doorway opposite, silent, pale, menacing. My God, how silly it all is!

"When Countess Stroganova arrived I asked Pushkin to go and talk to her. He consented, blushing (you know how he detests any form of servility) but suddenly stopped half way and came back to me. 'What's the matter?' 'I won't go to her, that Count is there.' 'What Count?' 'D'Anthès, Heckeren, or whatever you call him.' "

A most significant epistle. It is already

known from Sophia Karamzina's correspondence that Pushkin, Zhukovsky and Vielgorsky were at her name-day party on September 17, 1836, but this is the first time that she mentions the other guests, and, above all, writes of Pushkin's state.

Who were these guests?

Paul and Nadine were the children of Madame Karamzina's brother, Pyotr Vyazemsky. The Goncharovs, Alexandrina and Ekaterina, were the sisters of Pushkin's wife. Arkadi and Charles Rosset were young officers, the brothers of Madame Smirnova, friends of the Karamzins and admirers of Pushkin. General Staff officer Skalon, who shared quarters with the Rossets, was an equally warm admirer of Pushkin. Sergei Meshchersky was Ekaterina Karamzina-Meshcherskaya's brother-in-law. We come last to d'Anthès, who was not Count, but Baron Heckeren. Pushkin called him Count in irony, from his profound contempt for the position, wealth and title of this adopted son of a Dutch baron.

Such were the guests at dinner.

After dinner the aristocratic "neighbours" spending the summer in Tsarskoye Selo came in. Their social position comes from family

connections, and their names help us to form a more exact picture of the Karamzin salon, a circle in which Pushkin was doomed to live and write.

Lily Zakharzhevskaya, the wife of Benckendorff's brother-in-law, General Zakharzhevsky, was maid of honour to the Grand-Duchess Maria. The Sheviches, who have appeared before, were the sister and nephews of Benckendorff. Zolotnitsky was Benckendorff's nephew. Countess Stroganova was the daughter of Chancellor Kochubei. Princess Dolgorukova was the daughter of D. Golitsin, Governor-General of Moscow and an influential member of the aristocracy. The Prince Baryatinsky mentioned must have been Alexander, whose parents were among the Tsar's most intimate friends, and who was appointed to the Crown Prince's suite, the devoted friend of d'Anthès, as he signed himself in a letter. Lydia Bludova is the daughter of the Minister for the Interior. The Trubetskys—Prince Trubetskoi and his wife; he is an officer of *Cavaliers Gardes* and a relation of Madame Vyazemskaya.

The names quoted by Sophia comprise all that was most brilliant in court and government circles. They made up the social background of

the Karamzins. But they also made up Pushkin's social background.

The thirty-six-year-old Countess Stroganova whom the poet was asked to entertain was his first schoolboy love—Natalya Kochubei. In the thirties he had an idea of making her the heroine of a novel. She was a constant visitor at the Karamzins', who showed her particular respect, describing her in their letters as "piquant, gracious, brilliant, fascinating," and not forgetting to add that the Tsar was extremely attentive to her. Her father-in-law had been a famous diplomat in the time of Napoleon, an old official who enjoyed the esteem of the court and aristocracy. He was a near relative of the Goncharovs, and his illegitimate daughter Idalia Poletika was a sworn foe to Pushkin and a faithful friend to d'Anthès. Countess Stroganova's husband was the Tsar's adjutant and Governor-General of Kharkov.

The name of Countess Stroganova will recur later in the Karamzin letters, in connection with the attitude of Petersburg society to Pushkin—otherwise such a detailed description would, of course, be superfluous.

In her account of her name-day party Sophia supplies details of interest to Pushkin's biog-

raphers: d'Anthès continued his attentions to Madame Pushkina, while never leaving her sister Ekaterina's side. It is news to hear of him paying court to Ekaterina Goncharova as early as September 1836. "...Still up to his old tricks," writes Sophia, consequently d'Anthès must have been paying court to Ekaterina Goncharova for a long time.

On the 20th of September Madame Karamzina writes of the sudden appearance in their home of Zhukovsky, who stayed to dinner and was "delightful in his childlike gaiety." "After this," she continues, "came the brilliant rosy-fingered Aurora (she really is all rosy and lovely like the goddess whose name she bears). . . ."

These last words are evidently intended to confirm the lines of a poem written to Aurora by Baratynsky, a contemporary of Pushkin.

"She came to say good-bye," continues Madame Karamzina. "she is leaving for Finland tomorrow, where she is to wait for her *fiancé*, and after the wedding she and her golden husband will go abroad. You may come across her in Italy. She promised to be kind to you. But mind." Madame Karamzina warns her son, "don't fall head over ears in love with her, as

you so often do when you meet pretty women, and this one is really a beauty."

As we know, the effect of this warning was but short-lived. Ten years later Andrei Karamzin married Aurora Demidova, by then a widow.

We will pass over a few pages till we come to a letter from Alexander, dated 30th September, 1836.

"We had a big party here in Tsarskoye on the 17th. Sophia has probably told you all about it. My life here is so uneventful, so insipid and monotonous, that it is not worth speaking about. I spend three-quarters of my time with Arkadi [Rosset], sometimes go to the Pushkins, often visit [Uncle] Vyazemsky, who is living in Mokhovaya Street now.... I was at a musical *soirée* at the Heckerens' yesterday, where I was introduced to Madame Sukhozanet. On Friday I am to go to a dance at her house. Other people I talked to yesterday were the beautiful Fiquelment, she sends you greetings—and Madame Elise, who made frantic efforts to jump out of her dress. Then I took shelter in the Goncharov set. I'm going to spend the evening at the Pushkins' today."

"Madame Elise," the well-known Elizaveta Hitrovo, now no longer young, whose passion

for excessively low-cut dresses was the talk of Petersburg, is the daughter of Fieldmarshal Kutuzov. "The beauteous Fiquelment" is daughter to "Madame Elise," granddaughter to Kutuzov, and wife to Austrian Ambassador Fiquelment. These are Pushkin's best friends, his most solicitous friends.

At Ambassador Heckeren's musical *soirée* Alexander was introduced to the wife of his chief, Adjutant-General Sukhozanet. Sukhozanet was connected with Chief of Police Benckendorff through his son's marriage to Benckendorff's stepdaughter. The connection was a help to Sukhozanet in his career. On the 14th of December, 1825 his artillery fired on the Decembrists on Senate Square, in Petersburg. From this day the "tainted man," as Pushkin cautiously refers to him in his diary, began his upward progress.

From the Sukhozanets', Karamzin went on to the Pushkins', to the Goncharovs'. The meetings of the poet with the Karamzin family turned out to have been more frequent than has hitherto been suspected, the social ties closer.

Alexander adds on the margin (in Russian): "Pushkin has 700 subscribers—not very many. Odoevsky is preparing to bring out his

magazine, but nothing is ready yet. I'm going to see him the day after tomorrow. Send him an article. They say the third number of *Sovremennik* is very good, I haven't seen it yet. No more literary news."

This note tells us the exact number of subscribers to *Sovremennik* and the state of Pushkin's publishing affairs—we have only to compare Karamzin's figures with the figures for the circulation of the magazine. The first and second issues of *Sovremennik* had a circulation of 2,400. The circulation of the third was exactly half as much—1,200 and there were only 700 subscribers. Even Karamzin, Pushkin's contributor, who considered *Sovremennik* good, helps Odoyevsky with his new monthly. This is of course to be explained by the fact that Odoyevsky was his patron. The information about Odoyevsky's *Russian Almanach* is, however, belated—the Tsar had prohibited its publication as long ago as the 16th of September.

October came. The Karamzins left Tsarskoye Selo for their house in town. On Sunday, 18th October, Vyazemsky's daughter, the youthful Madame Valuyeva, "gave a tea party."

"There were the inevitable Pushkins and Goncharovs," writes Sophia, "Sollogub and my

brothers. Mama and I were not there, we had visitors”

Sophia says nothing of Pushkin's state, she was not at the Valuyevs'. But it is to be noted that the Valuyev party was held the day before the party given by M. Yakovlev to celebrate the anniversary of the graduation of Pushkin and his friends from the *Lycée*, when Pushkin broke into tears while reciting his poetry.*

The Karamzins are “at home”: the guests included, first and foremost, Ogaryova, the sister of the all-powerful Count Kleinmichel, one of the Tsar's closest collaborators. Next in interest comes the young Dolgorukov, who, according to some opinions, was the writer of the foul anonymous diploma, of which more will be said later. It is our first intimation that this loathsome individual visited the Karamzins. Count Komarovsky is an officer of the Horse Guards, a constant visitor to the Karamzin drawing-room, and an old friend of Pushkin.

“As you see,” continues Sophia, “we are back in our usual town way of life. Our evenings

* Many of Pushkin's former schoolfellows were now dead, having participated in the Decembrists uprising (1825).--*Tr.*

have started again, and from the very first day all the familiar persons occupied their familiar places—Natalya Pushkina and d'Anthès, Ekaterina Goncharova next to Alexander, Alexandrina and Arkadi—and at midnight the Vyazemskys, once—no doubt from sheer absence of mind—Vielgorsky”*

And so Madame Pushkina and her sisters, d'Anthès, Arkadi Rosset, the Vyazemskys, and Alexander Karamzin, all belong to the same set.

The day after, on the morning of the 20th of October, Madame Karamzina informs her son:

“We talked a great deal about *Sovremennik* yesterday. You never let me know if you got it, but Prince Pyotr [Vyazemsky] certainly sent it to you. . . . I will try and send you the third number, which has just come out. Everyone says it's better than the others and should bring back Pushkin's popularity. I haven't seen it myself, but some bits were read to us out of it. There are some lovely things by the editor [Pushkin], some nice ones by Vyazemsky and an indescribable absurdity by Gogol—*The Nose*.

* Vielgorsky lived in the same house. Perhaps Sophia thinks he mistook the door.—*Tr.*

"Sophia is very indignant, but it made me laugh, though I could find in it not a grain, I will not say of common sense—fantastic stories can dispense with that—but even imagination must have something probable about it."

A letter of 3rd November is full of the most varied tidings. First of all, Sophia hastens to tell her brother of a thing which had excited the whole of Petersburg "from the editors to the clergy"—Chaadayev's *Philosophical Letter*, which came out in *Telescope*. As has already been said she criticizes this work harshly.

"What do you think of the censorship for letting all this pass?" she writes. "Pushkin has compared it [the censorship] very aptly to a mettlesome steed which nothing on earth will make jump over a white handkerchief, i. e., certain prohibited words, such as liberty, revolution, etc., but which leaps right across an abyss, so long as it is black, and breaks its neck. . . . We always have a few people to tea," she continues, "among them d'Anthès, who is always very amusing. He asked me to send you his greetings."

Three days later, on the 6th of November, Alexander informs his brother:

"Odoevsky has been forbidden to bring out his magazine. Our literary fame has turned out to be short-lived, old man, our names were printed in the prospectus, and there it ended. Anyhow, as far as I am concerned, I have quite given up the idea of becoming a writer. If I ever did cherish any illusions about my poetic gifts, they have long ago died of inanition."

The news that Odoevsky's *Russian Almanach* had been prohibited was, as we have already mentioned, somewhat belated. The assurance that Alexander Karamzin had quite given up a literary career was, on the contrary, somewhat premature. He published his poems under a pseudonym in 1837, and in 1839 he brought out a novel in verse, while his poems were reprinted in *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*.

In the letter of 6th November there are also a few lines about Madame Pushkina.

"Tomorrow, if it interests you to know," writes Alexander Karamzin, "I am going to have *déjeuner* with Madame Pushkina, which I do every Saturday, accompanying it with a regular budget of civilities."

The day on which Alexander Karamzin intended to have lunch at the Pushkins'—Satur-

day, the 7th of November—is of great interest, coming as it does in the midst of days fraught with tragic events for Pushkin.



On the 4th of November some members of the Karamzin circle—the Vyazemskys, Zhukovsky, the Rosset brothers, Vielgorsky and others—received through the post copies of an anonymous letter addressed to Pushkin. Each of the envelopes had one and the same contents—a coarse lampoon in French (in printed letters) composed in the form of a diploma certifying Pushkin's election to the post of Vice-President of the Order of Horn-Bearers. Convinced that the provocation had been furnished by the insistent attentions of d'Anthès to Madame Pushkina, Pushkin challenged him to a duel. Ambassador Heckeren, alarmed, came to an agreement with Pushkin to postpone it for a fortnight. Madame Pushkina's aunt, Madame Zagryazhskaya, Vielgorsky and Zhukovsky, undertook the office of mediators.

Learning of Heckeren's intention to settle the conflict in a way that would permit d'Anthès to go on frequenting the company of Madame Pushkina and her sister, Pushkin flew into a fury. His depression finds reflection in the rough notes jotted down by Zhukovsky. "His tears ..." writes Zhukovsky on the 8th of November.

Now why did not the Karamzins let Andrei into the secret? Before us lie their letters of the 10th and 11th of November. Not a word about Pushkin. Does this mean they did not know of these events? They knew very well. They knew all about the anonymous "diploma" and the challenge, the postponement Pushkin conceded to d'Anthès, Pushkin's depression. In the first place they must have known, since Sophia was among those who had received the notorious lampoon of the 4th of November, and in the second place, Pushkin himself had confided in them his domestic tragedy and told them of the measures he was taking. "Why did you tell Ekaterina Andreyevna [Madame Karamzina] and Sophia Nikolayevna all about it?" writes Zhukovsky, who was doing his best to settle the conflict. "What do you want? To

make that impossible which bids fair to end in the very best of ways for yourself?"

Zhukovsky insisted that Pushkin keep his challenge a secret. Then a duel might be averted. He assures Pushkin that it was old Heckerren who was working for a postponement, that d'Anthès knows nothing about it. "I told the Karamzins the same thing," he writes to Pushkin, "earnestly requesting them not to repeat anything you told them, and assuring them that you will certainly have to fight if the secret comes out now, or even later. . . ."

That is why the Karamzins preserve silence, they do it in the interests of Pushkin. Andrei Karamzin heard of the anonymous lampoon from Arkadi Rosset. And it was only when Zhukovsky told them that there was no more danger of a duel, Pushkin having withdrawn his challenge, that the mother and sister wrote Andrei in their letters what was to them the most extraordinary feature of the whole story, and what was occupying the minds of the whole of Petersburg society—the proposal made by d'Anthès to Ekaterina Goncharova, Madame Pushkina's sister.

"We shall soon be having a wedding," writes Madame Karamzina on the 20th of November.

“Who is going to marry whom, you’ll never be able to guess, and I will not tell you, I’ll leave that pleasure to your sister. Put you probably know it already from Arkadi Rosset. It’s simply incredible—the marriage, I mean—but anything is possible in this world of improbabilities. Well, good-bye, I am rather tired and I must leave a page for Sophia, so as not to deprive her of the pleasure of a gossip with you. Alexander is busy at his toilet, he is going to Princess Beloselskaya’s rout, and before that he is going to dine with d’Anthès.”

Princess Beloselskaya, Count Benckendorff’s stepdaughter, was one of Pushkin’s bitterest foes.

“I have another very strange piece of news for you” (it is Sophia writing now). “The wedding Mama began telling you about. Have you guessed? You know both parties well, we have often talked about them, but never in earnest. The behaviour of the young woman, however innocent it may be, is bound to compromise another, for who is going to look at a mediocre painting when there is a Raphael Madonna just beside it? And yet an admirer has been found for the painting I have mentioned—perhaps because it was easier to acquire. Guess! Well,

then, it's d'Anthès, that haughty young Adonis (very *rich*, by the way); he is going to marry Ekaterina Goncharova and I must say he looks as if he were very pleased about it. He seems to be carried away by a sort of feverish gaiety and frivolity. He comes to see us every evening, for he can only meet his intended bride in the mornings, at her aunt's. Pushkin won't have him in his house, being extremely *angry* with him after that *letter* Arkadi told you about [the anonymous lampoon]. Natalie is very nervous and reserved, and her voice breaks when she speaks of her sister's wedding. Ekaterina is wild with joy. She herself says she scarcely dares to believe that her dream has come true. Society is amazed, but since the story of the *letter* is not known to most people, the match is explained more *simply*. And it will only be the fault of Pushkin himself, if by his excitement, his enigmatic exclamations addressed to all and sundry, his manner of snubbing d'Anthès when they meet in society, or demonstratively shunning him, he at last makes people suspect something and start guessing. Vyazemsky says he is offended for his wife, because d'Anthès does not pay court to her any more. I was at the Saltykovs' on Wednes-

day, where the wedding was announced and the happy couple received congratulations. When d'Anthès heard I was writing to you he asked me to tell you he is very happy and hopes you will wish him luck."

"It's self-sacrifice," replied Andrei, amazed at what his sister had told him and suggesting that d'Anthès had performed this trick in his sleep.

"What is it? Magnanimity or sacrifice?" asked the Tsaritsa, who wanted to know all about this "incredible marriage of d'Anthès." "Could the reason for it really have been the anonymous letter?" she wondered.

The rumour of the coming marriage threw into amazement all those who had for many months past been observing the relations between d'Anthès and Madame Pushkina. Nobody could believe he was marrying of his own free will. Madame Pushkina was one of the most beautiful women in the world, and Ekaterina Goncharova, while tall and stately and not unlike her sister in the face, had been compared by a contemporary to a horse or a broomstick.

Among Pushkin's biographers the idea has always prevailed that Ekaterina Goncharova

was in love with d'Anthès, who had a passion for Madame Pushkina. After the circulation of the anonymous letter, when Pushkin sent a challenge to d'Anthès (in November), the two Heckerens formed the following project—they explained to Pushkin that d'Anthès was in love with his sister-in-law and would make her an offer if Pushkin withdrew his challenge and kept the affair a secret. Till now it has been considered that up to the time of the anonymous lampoon there had been no idea of a marriage between d'Anthès and Ekaterina, and that this project was the result of the anonymous letter and the subsequent challenge. There are, however, facts which would seem to contradict such a surmise: late in October 1836, i. e., a long time before Pushkin received the lampoon, his father, in a letter from Moscow to his daughter in Warsaw, that has not been preserved, spoke of the coming marriage of Ekaterina Goncharova and on the 2nd of November (again before the lampoon—two days earlier), his daughter replied: "What you tell me of Mademoiselle Goncharova's marriage comes as a surprise."

Consequently there must have been talk of her marriage long before Pushkin received the

lampoon. Attention has been drawn to this by P. Shchegolev, author of *The Duel and Death of Pushkin*. But B. Kazansky, author of fresh researches into the death of Pushkin, is convinced of the contrary, considering that the marriage of Ekaterina Goncharova alluded to in the correspondence between Pushkin's father and sister was not with d'Anthès.

True, the name of d'Anthès is not mentioned in this correspondence. Now, however, after the discovery of the Karamzin letters, the question of the match with d'Anthès requires reconsideration, for it is quite clear that the names of Ekaterina Goncharova and d'Anthès had already been connected early in 1836 (before Andrei Karamzin's departure abroad), that the affair was going on in the summer and autumn of the same year (we recall that d'Anthès never left Ekaterina's side, while his whole attention was fixed on her sister). The Karamzin letters show that long before the receiving of the lampoon Ekaterina Goncharova had played a sorry part in regard to her sister, first acting as a go-between, then coming forward as a mistress (*amante*), and subsequently as a wife. We shall hear more of this later on.

In addition to this, yet another circumstance

is known to us. As long ago as October, also some time before the receiving of the lampoon, Madame Pushkina had rejected the advances of d'Anthès. We learn of this from the unpublished contemporary diary of Princess Maria Baryatinskaya, which has been put at my disposal by the literary critic M. Ashukina-Zenger, who called attention to the significant passage.

But first a word of Maria Baryatinskaya.

The Baryatinskys were friends both of the Karamzins and the Pushkins. D'Anthès was a constant visitor to the Baryatinskys. A pretty girl, belonging to one of the most privileged families in Russia, she was interested in balls, cavalcades, court festivities, social gossip. . . .

About the 24th of October, 1836 she entered in her diary a conversation in connection with the rumour that d'Anthès was going to get married. Princess Baryatinskaya took an interest in d'Anthès, and her relatives decided to find out, through Trubetskoi, a Cavaliers Gardes officer and the most intimate friend of d'Anthès, how much truth there was in the rumour. "And *Maman*," writes Princess Maria, "learned from Trubetskoi that Madame Pushkina had rejected him. Perhaps that is why he

wants to get married. *On the rebound*. I will thank him if he dares to make me such a proposal!"

So Madame Pushkina had repulsed d'Anthès three weeks before the receipt by Pushkin of the anonymous letter. And two weeks before this—some time in the last ten days of October, the rumour was being spread that d'Anthès was going to be married. And very soon after this came the rumour that it was Ekaterina Goncharova he was going to marry. Otherwise Pushkin's father could not have known this in Moscow in the month of October.

Moreover, Zhukovsky is known to have said that Ambassador Heckeren offered him some sort of "material proof" that the affair under discussion—that is, d'Anthès' proposal to Pushkin's sister-in-law—dated much further back than Pushkin's challenge, consequently before the receipt of the anonymous letter in October.

So now we know:

1. that Madame Pushkina repulsed d'Anthès in October,

2. that rumours of Ekaterina Goncharova's marriage were afoot at that time,

3. that d'Anthès' marriage was rumoured at the same time,

4. that, according to Ambassador Heckeren, the match between d'Anthès and Pushkin's sister-in-law was then under consideration.

All these events took place in the second half of October, in a comparatively short period, and all came before the appearance of the lampoon.

It thus becomes clear that the lampoon was an act of vengeance both for Madame Pushkina's action, which lowered d'Anthès in the eyes of society, and for the project, most likely originating with the Goncharovs' aunt, E. Zagryazhskaya, for a marriage between Ekaterina and d'Anthès which, in the opinion of the Goncharov family, the tenets of honour required.

However this may be, these facts are bound to change the attitude of critics—not to the contents of the lampoon, but, as the law has it, to the causal connection of events.

It will not be out of place to recall that, as long ago as 1929, Professor L. Grossman wrote that d'Anthès was forced into marriage by the relations of Ekaterina Goncharova. P. Shchegolev rejected this version at the time, as we now see without sufficient grounds.

Let us go back to Sophia Karamzina's letter.

It may be understood from this letter that Ekaterina Goncharova had been unable to conceal her feelings for d'Anthès (remember the words of "behaviour compromising to this young woman"). But the possibility of a marriage had never entered into the heads of any of the Karamzins. Ekaterina herself scarcely dared to believe in it. D'Anthès' action evoked universal astonishment. So far very few knew anything about the anonymous letter; Pushkin's friends tried to keep it a secret. And so, writes Sophia, the society gossips explained this "*more simply*." How did they explain it? In various ways—many are sure that it was Pushkin who was forcing d'Anthès to marry, after having discovered that there was an affair between him and Ekaterina. Others think d'Anthès is doing it to save Madame Pushkina's honour, that it is a self-sacrifice. And no one but Pushkin himself, with his enigmatic explanations and his behaviour to d'Anthès, says the worried Sophia, raises any suspicions of the truth, causing people to suspect that there is something more than meets the eye in all this, to hunt about for another reason. And just because the Karamzins are aware of the connection between d'Anthès' sudden "falling in love" with Ekate-

rina Goncharova and the anonymous letter, they are afraid society may discover it too. Hence the mysterious, ambiguous tone of the letter to Andrei, and the three weeks' silence. They said nothing about all this, even to Andrei abroad, until the complications appeared to have been unravelled, and Pushkin had withdrawn his challenge.

Madame Pushkina is offended. With her sister's connivance d'Anthès has dealt a blow at her pride and prestige, has humiliated her, placed her in a false position, made her the object of society gossip.

Influenced by a sense of injury and jealousy, she tells Pushkin what Ambassador Heckeren had whispered in her ear, persuading her to be untrue to her duty, to abandon her husband and go abroad with d'Anthès. She chose the very time when d'Anthès was making an offer to her sister to reveal to her husband the base conduct of the two Heckerens. No wonder she is "nervous and reserved, and her voice breaks when she speaks of her sister's wedding." No wonder Pushkin is more irate than ever with the Heckerens, refuses to receive d'Anthès and Ekaterina in his home, declaring that there can be nothing in common between the houses of

the Pushkins and the Heckerens, no wonder he shuns d'Anthès and is rude to him, no wonder he makes the impression of being offended for his wife's sake! Not, of course, offended so much as profoundly hurt. Professor Kazansky is right in considering that the whole story of the match between d'Anthès and Ekaterina Goncharova makes Pushkin regard the attitude of d'Anthès to his wife in a different light, makes it appear like an insult.

But such are the ideas of society regarding decency and questions of honour, that the Karamzins maintain their neutrality, keeping up friendly relations with the Pushkins and at the same time helping d'Anthès and Ekaterina to meet, since this has become impossible for them at the Pushkins'.

Sophia Karamzina gives an extremely subjective description of Pushkin's behaviour, based entirely on her own impressions. Pushkin, as has already been said, still goes to the Karamzins' after the 4th of November. He is invited to dinner on the 16th, Madame Karamzina's birthday, during which, speaking in rapid undertones, he entrusts the writer Sollogub to meet Viscount d'Archiac (d'Anthès' relative and second) and make the arrange-

ments for the duel. The two weeks' grace has expired.

At eleven o'clock, their guests having dispersed, the Karamzins go on to a rout at the house of the Austrian Ambassador, Fiquelment.

Owing to the death of the King of France, Charles X, (dethroned by the French Revolution in July 1830) the court is in mourning, and all four hundred guests of the Austrian embassy are in black. All except Ekaterina Goncharova, conspicuous in her white gown, which her position as a future bride entitles her to wear. D'Anthès hangs around her, all smiles and compliments.

Pushkin who has come alone, without his wife, forbids Ekaterina to speak to d'Anthès, and himself addresses a few extremely rude words to him.

Two days later, on the 18th of November, d'Anthès' coming wedding is announced at a ball at the Saltykovs' (Sophia Karamzina was at this ball).

Pushkin refuses to believe the news, making a bet with Sollogub that the wedding will not take place.



After having withdrawn his challenge, Pushkin wrote the letter to Ambassador Heckeren which played such an important part in the further development of events. He read it to Sollogub on the 21st of November, saying: "...I've finished with the son—now for the old man!" "He then," says Sollogub, "read me the well-known letter to the Dutch ambassador. His lips trembled, his eyes were bloodshot. He looked so terrible that I understood he really was of African descent.*

Anxious to avert a fresh conflict, Sollogub told Zhukovsky about it. That same evening at the Karamzins', Zhukovsky calmed his anxiety—the affair had been smoothed over, the letter would not be sent.

After this, on that same 21st of November, Pushkin wrote to Benckendorff, stating that the writer of the anonymous letter was Ambassador Heckeren, and that he considered it his

* On his mother's side Pushkin was the great-grandson of Abyssinian Ibrahim Hannibal, prominent statesman in the reign of Peter the Great.—*Tr.*

duty to inform the government and society of this.

Benckendorff reported it to the Tsar. Unwilling to compromise a European diplomat, Nikolai gave audience to Pushkin.

This was on Monday, November 23, 1837. That evening Sophia Karamzina danced at the Saxon envoy's with cavalry officer Golovin, officer of the Horse Artillery Ogaryov, and officer of the Grenadier Guards Khrushchov—

“... And the mazurka with Sollogub who for once had something to talk to me about—Pushkin's frenzy and the sudden infatuation of d'Anthès for his intended.... Sollogub still keeps up a pretence of *despising* society and exposes its worthlessness with the utmost energy, thus betraying the fact that he is *not indifferent* to it. He makes up to Madame Pushkina and is quite popular in society....”

We learn this in a letter of the 28th November. When, early in 1836, Pushkin was told of a conversation between Sollogub and Madame Pushkina, the tone of which seemed to him insufficiently respectful on Sollogub's part, he sent him a challenge, but allowed himself to be satisfied with an apology. He did not seek a duel, but merely observed the

formalities required by the times. Good relations were revived, and in November Pushkin chose Sollogub as an arbiter between himself and d'Anthès.

Pushkin saw no harm in the mere fact of anyone paying court to his wife, so long as the attentions and admiration of her beauty did not exceed the limits of unqualified respect for herself and the name she bore. In November Sollogub thoroughly understood this.

But the news that Sollogub was "making up to Madame Pushkina" can hardly be meant to apply to the evening on which Sophia Karamzina danced with him at the Saxon envoy's, and more likely refers to the autumn of the preceding year (1836). Such an observation could hardly have been made a day after Pushkin had read his letter to Ambassador Heckeren to Sollogub.

The name of Pushkin does not figure in the next few letters, and d'Anthès is only mentioned once.

29th December, 1837. Handwriting of Sophia Karamzina. She begins her letter with eager information about d'Anthès: The wedding has been fixed for the 10th of January. Her brothers are impressed by the elegance of

the apartment prepared for the young couple, and by the abundance of the silverware. D'Anthès speaks of his betrothed "with obvious satisfaction." Heckeren *père* spoils her.

"Pushkin, on the other hand, continues to behave in the most stupid and ridiculous manner. The expression on his face is tigerish, he grinds his teeth whenever he speaks of the wedding, which he is always ready to do, and is very glad if he finds a *new* listener. You should have heard how eagerly he told sister Ekaterina [Meshcherskaya] all the *obscure* and mostly *imaginary* details of this mysterious affair; you would think he was telling her about a play or a novel which had nothing whatever to do with himself; he still insists that he will not allow his wife to go to the wedding, or to receive her sister in his house after her *marriage*. I tried to persuade Natalie yesterday to get him to give up this *ridiculous* decision, which, of course, will give rise to still more gossip. As for her, there is something not very straightforward about her behaviour—in front of her husband she does not bow to d'Anthès, doesn't so much as glance at him, but when her husband is not there she starts her old coquetry—lowered eyelids, abstracted

manner, embarrassment, and d'Anthès immediately comes and sits down opposite her, casting long looks at her and apparently quite forgetting about his betrothed, who changes countenance and is tortured by jealousy. In a word, a sort of comedy is being acted, the meaning of which nobody really understands. . . . And in the meantime poor d'Anthès has been seriously ill with an inflammation in the side, he looks wretched, he has changed greatly. He suddenly appeared at the Meshcherskys' the other day, thin, pale, very *interesting*. He was remarkably tender with us all, as people sometimes are when they are deeply agitated or unhappy. The next day he went there again, this time with his intended, and, unfortunately, the Pushkins were there, too, and once again the grimaces of hatred and poetic wrath began: sombre as the night, frowning like Jupiter in his wrath, Pushkin only broke his morose silence, so *embarrassing* for everyone, by occasional abrupt, ironical exclamations and, from time to time, demoniacal laughter. I assure you, he was simply ridiculous. . . . By way of variety, I will inform you that the fourth number of *Sovremennik* is out, and has Pushkin's new novel, *The Captain's*

Daughter, in it, which everyone says is admirable.

"I went with Madame Pushkina yesterday to a ball at the Saltykovs' and enjoyed myself much more than at the court balls."

Despite the fact that Sophia Karamzina chooses to consider Pushkin's behaviour ridiculous, it is impossible to read of his suffering unmoved. Sophia's stepsister Ekaterina Meshcherskaya, returning from the country after a long absence, said afterwards that she had been struck by Pushkin's feverish state, by his "convulsive movements, beginning in his face and passing over his whole body at the sight of his future murderer." According to Countess Stroganova he looked so appalling all these days that if she had been his wife she would have been afraid to go home with him. Madame Vyazemskaya had refused to receive d'Anthès and Pushkin together as long ago as the autumn, and had told d'Anthès not to come in if there were carriages at her door. Thus another house was closed to d'Anthès. "After this," writes one of Pushkin's biographers, quoting Madame Vyazemskaya, "his meetings with Madame Pushkina took place at the Karamzins'."

Sophia Karamzina blames Pushkin, blames

Madame Pushkina; but d'Anthès she does not blame—d'Anthès is “unfortunate.”

She intervenes in their family affairs, trying in a friendly way to get Natalya to influence her husband. There is much that is incomprehensible to Sophia herself in the whole thing—“mysterious affair,” she writes, “a comedy, the meaning of which nobody really understands.” Yet she blames Pushkin and pities d'Anthès. And after all, Pushkin was their friend, considered them his best friends, had no others in the whole of Petersburg so intimate! Theirs was a friendship of twenty years' standing.

But Sophia Karamzina, as we shall see, giving no thought to the consequences, once more shares the general opinion as to this conflict—the opinion of society, against which Pushkin had always stood out, the opinion of all these high-placed ladies and gentlemen. . . .

Her letter of 9th January, 1837 is devoted to d'Anthès' coming marriage. “Tomorrow, Sunday, this strange wedding will take place.” The Karamzins mean to be present at the ceremony in the catholic Church of Saint Ekaterina. And Sophia's stepbrothers, Alexander and Vladimir, will be the bride's pages.

“And Pushkin,” she continued, “will lose

more than one bet tomorrow, for he has gone, round *betting* everyone that this wedding is a mere sham and will never take place. All this is very odd and inexplicable and can hardly be very pleasant for d'Anthès. He certainly does *not* look like a man in love. Ekaterina is happy—much happier than he is.”

The next letter, dated 12th January, 1837, begins with a description of the impression made on everyone by Andrei's last letter from Paris.

“Zhukovsky, Turgenev, Vielgorsky and Pushkin, all *wanted* to hear your letter, and all have the same opinion of it—they consider it reveals a high order of brains, and a vivid, lively imagination.”

Passing on from this to the news and gossip, Sophia writes:

“And so the d'Anthès' wedding really *did take place* on Sunday. I was present at the toilet of Mademoiselle Goncharova, but her disagreeable Aunt Zagryazhskaya *made a scene* when the ladies told her I was going with them to the church. It may have been with the best intentions, to prevent unnecessary talk, but she poured out on me all the *bitterness* which has been accumulating for the whole week owing

to the chatter of so many indiscreet well-wishers."

Sophia almost cried.

"It wasn't very *nice* for me, and what made it particularly vexatious was that I lost hope of seeing at close quarters the faces of the principal actors in the final scene of this mysterious drama."

These lines are striking from the unconcealed curiosity they reveal, and the utter failure to understand the significance of what was going on. Sophia Karamzina naïvely supposes that the wedding is the final scene of a mysterious drama. She is speaking, of course, of the drama of d'Anthès, but it was not the finale even of his destiny!

The day after the wedding d'Anthès and his wife visited the Karamzins. Sophia returned the visit. She was in ecstasies over the rooms and the comfort, and writes that she had never seen faces looking gayer or more serene.

"... I mean the faces of all *three*, for the father is an inseparable participator in this domestic drama. It cannot be," Sophia exclaims, "that it was all pretence on their part, this would require superhuman *reserve*, and moreover they

would have to keep up the game for the rest of their lives. Incomprehensible!"

Withal, Sophia is, of course, extremely glib. In her admiration for d'Anthès she sees in his courteous smile the expression of joy, his flat witticisms amuse her, she cannot believe him capable of superhuman reserve, she has no idea how cynical the serenity of a careerist can be.

On the 16th of January, 1837, Alexander Karamzin, confined to barracks, sets himself to write a long letter. After alluding to his detestable chief, who has put him in the guard-room under arrest for a week, he turns to the news—literary and social.

"A week ago we celebrated the wedding of Baron Heckeren and Mademoiselle Goncharova," he writes. "I was the bride's page. The next day I lunched with them. I was delighted with their elegant *intérieur*. Two days ago there was a wedding dinner with excellent wine at old Stroganov's (who gave the bride away). Thus ends this *roman à la Balzac* to the extreme annoyance of the Petersburg gossips, male and female. . . . I must tell you," he continues, turning the page, "that I sent a few of my poems to Vyazemsky for his almanach, and some to

Odoyevsky, who is collecting material for a supplement to *Russian Invalid* which has now become, or will soon become, quite a decent literary paper. It is a huge volume, and it comes out once a week."

The fourth number of *Sovremennik* had contained a notice to the effect that an almanach called *The Old and the New* would be coming out early in 1837, under the editorship of Prince Vyazemsky. Vyazemsky intended to print, side by side with letters from the Tsarevich Alexei, Ekaterina II, and the historian N. Karamzin, extracts from memoirs and historical anecdotes, contemporary poems, novels, and letters on Russian literature. He at first called the almanach *The Old*, the words "*and the New*" were added at the suggestion of Pushkin.

For reasons unknown to us the almanach never appeared. Nor, as has already been mentioned, did Odoyevsky's and Krayevsky's *Russian Almanach* come out. The latter then signed a contract for the right to publish a *Literary Supplement to Russian Invalid*. Alexander Karamzin's name is to be found in the list of contributors to this publication.

Passing lightly over various unimportant items, Alexander adds on the last page:

"We have some clever men—Vielgorsky, Alexander Turgenev, Zhukovsky, Pushkin and others. Sometimes they are charming, but other times they are such bores, that even fools like us cannot compete with them. . . . But enough of this chatter. . . . Time for a bite and a *sleep*."

On the morning of the 27th of January Madame Karamzina continues a letter begun the day before:

"Wednesday. 10 o'clock. No one but Liza and I are up in the whole house, dear friend. Sophie and Sashka are still sleeping off the ball at Countess Razumovskaya's."

The page comes to an end. The household are up. Sophia begins the next page. Last Thursday they were invited to the Fiquelmets, where there was a ball and five hundred guests, "very nice, very lively, very elegant."

"And on Sunday Ekaterina [Meshcherskaya] gave a big party, to which came the Pushkins and the Heckerens, who are still acting their sentimental comedy, to the great delight of the public. Pushkin grinds his teeth, and assumes his tigerish expression, Natalie lowers her eyes and blushes beneath the prolonged gaze of her *beau-frère*. It is becoming immoral in the highest degree. Ekaterina jealously turns her lor-

nette on the pair, and, so that nobody shall be without a part in this drama, Alexandrina [Goncharova] flirts desperately with Pushkin, who seems to be seriously in love with her. He is jealous of his wife on principle, and of his sister-in-law, from feeling. It's all very strange, anyhow. Uncle Vyazemsky says he *covers his face and turns it away from the whole Pushkin family.*"

At the time these lines are being penned, Pushkin was waiting in Wolff's *confiserie* for his second, Danzas, who had gone to fetch pistols. . . .



The next letter is from the mother, from Madame Karamzina, and it is written in Russian—its contents were so important that she felt an impulse to use her own language.

"Saturday. 30th January, 1837. Petersburg.

"Dear Andryusha, I write to you with eyes filled with tears, and a heart filled with grief and sorrow; the divine star has set, Russia has lost Pushkin. He fought a duel with d'Anthès

on Wednesday, and d'Anthès sent a bullet through his body; immortal Pushkin lived for two days, and yesterday, Friday, departed this life; I had the bitter joy of bidding him farewell on Thursday; he wished it himself. You may imagine my feelings at that moment, especially when I tell you that Arendt had said from the very first moment that there was not the slightest hope.

"He stretched out his hand to me, I pressed it, and he pressed mine, and then made a sign for me to go. As I left I made the sign of the cross over him from a distance, he again stretched out his hand and said softly, '*Do it again,*' so, pressing his hand once more, I made the sign of the cross over him, placing my fingers on his brow, and laying my hand on his cheek; he kissed it gently and again waved me away. He was as white as a sheet, but so beautiful; his marvellous countenance expressed perfect tranquillity.

"I don't want to go into any more details about how and why this great misfortune occurred—they are hateful to me; Sophie will tell you them. Besides I'm sorry for you; I know and feel how this news will grieve you. The loss for Russia, but especially for us. . . . He was a

warm admirer of your father, and our steady friend for twenty years. . . .

"These duels are terrible," she continues, going over to French. "And what can they prove? Pushkin is no longer alive, and those who remain will never give this story a thought in two years' time. May heaven preserve you from such a step, may your heart and your mind restrain you from it. I press you to my broken heart, I am sorry this grief should touch you. . . ."

Sophia takes up the pen:

"And I spoke to you so lightly last Wednesday about this mournful drama, on the very day, even the very hour, when it ended so tragically. Oh, poor Pushkin! How he must have suffered all those three months after receiving that foul anonymous letter, which served as the cause, or at any rate the *ostensible* cause, of such a terrible misfortune! I cannot tell you what exactly evoked this duel, surely d'Anthès' marriage should have made it impossible. But nobody knows a thing about it. People think Pushkin's irritation had already reached its limit last Saturday, when he saw his wife talking, laughing and *waltzing* with d'Anthès at the Vorontsov ball, and the reckless woman was not afraid to meet

him again on Sunday at the Meshcherskys' and on Monday at the Vyazemskys'. When he was leaving, Pushkin said to my aunt, 'He doesn't know what awaits him at home.' He meant his letter to Heckeren *père*, beyond all measure insulting, in which he called him an old pimp (and he really did play this part) and his son a contemptible *coward*. He accused d'Anthès of daring even *after his marriage* to indulge in barrack-room witticisms and *vile protestations* of love for Madame Pushkina and threatened to *insult* him publicly at the ball, if a *written insult* was insufficient for him. Then d'Anthès sent some d'Archiac from the French embassy to him as a second, to take back his challenge. This was on Tuesday morning, and I saw Pushkin for the *last time* that evening at Countess Razumovskaya's ball; he was calm, laughed, talked, joked. He pressed my hand more warmly than usual, but I took no notice of it. On Wednesday morning he went to his school-mate Danzas to ask him to be his second, met him in the street, took him into his sleigh, and explained to him then and there what the matter was, and soon after four they were on their way to the appointed place—on the road to Pargolovo, near the Odoyevsky estate. They say

Pushkin displayed the most remarkable calmness and energy. D'Anthès aimed first and wounded him in the middle of his body; he fell, but when Danzas rushed up to support him he shouted, 'Back to your place, my turn to fire!' He was raised and supported; when the pistol fell out of his hand on the snow, Danzas handed him another. He took aim for a long time, the bullet entered d'Anthès arm, but only in the soft part, and stopped before getting to his stomach, where a button on his uniform protected him, so that he only received a slight contusion in the breast; but at first he swayed and fell, and Pushkin threw his pistol into the air and shouted, 'Bravo!' Then, seeing that d'Anthès was on his feet and moving, he said, '*Ah, so our duel is not over!*' It was, but he thought he was only wounded in the thigh. On the way home the shaking of the carriage caused him violent pains in his stomach. Then he said to Danzas, 'It seems to be serious. Listen—if Arendt says my wound is mortal, mind you tell me! You won't frighten me. I have no desire to live.'

"When he got home he saw his wife and said, 'How happy I am that I can see you and embrace you again! Whatever happens, you

are in no way to blame, and must not reproach yourself, my dear one.' Arendt declared at once that the wound was mortal, the main artery and the veins were severed so that there was internal bleeding and the intestines were wounded. Pushkin heard this sentence *with imperturbable calm, with a smile*. He took the sacrament, forgave everyone. He was conscious till the last moment and observed the ebbing of his glorious life with perfect awareness. He received a letter from His Majesty full of sympathy, expressing the desire that he would die as a Christian should, and telling him not to worry about the fate of his wife and children, for His Majesty would look after them. Pushkin did not suffer long; the whole time he behaved with consistent affection for his poor wife. Five minutes before his death he said to the doctor, 'Well, life seems to be coming to an end.' He closed his eyes without undergoing any agony, and I know nothing more beautiful than his face after death—a countenance all peace and tranquillity, thoughtful and inspired, the lips *smiling*. I have never seen such a clear, consoling, poetical expression of the face of a dead person. His unhappy wife is in a terrible state, almost out of her mind; that is easy to

understand. It is terrible to think of her. Good-bye, dear André. I love you dearly, *Sophie*."

It was already known—from the words of those around him—that Pushkin had wished to take leave of Madame Karamzina before his death. But in her own narrative, filled with high simplicity and austerity, Pushkin stands before us in such infinite majesty that, in the power and nobility of the feelings it evokes, this modest communication deserves a place among the most remarkable documents in Pushkin's biography. How vivid this letter is! And how good each phrase in it is—the Karamzin style—"I had the bitter joy of bidding him farewell. . . ."

Sophia Karamzina's letter contains no new facts. Of the duel and Pushkin's last days she writes what she has heard from d'Archiac, Danzas, Vyazemsky, Turgenev, Meshchersky. After Pushkin pressed her hand at Countess Razumovskaya's ball, she never saw him again till he was in his coffin. But her account recreates the events of those last days and makes us live through them again.

Sophia is completely at a loss: What exactly caused this duel? Which act of d'Anthès was

the fatal one, impelling Pushkin to take out of his desk the letter to Heckeren which he had read to Sollogub in November, to insert between its lines fresh insults, and send it to the Dutch ambassador? This letter is considered to have been completed and dispatched on the 26th of January. B. Kazansky insists that the date was the 25th and Sophia Karamzina's letter confirms this supposition. Thus the chronology of the three last days of Pushkin's life is finally established.

Vyazemsky, who apparently heard it from d'Archiac afterwards, transmitted the phrase uttered by Pushkin an hour before the duel: "I only breathed freely, since the beginning of this affair, after I had written this letter." And according to Sophia Karamzina on the evening before the duel Pushkin laughed, talked and joked. There are other details in the letter completing the picture of Pushkin's death.

Madame Karamzina took advantage of the departure of d'Archiac, whose participation in the duel made it necessary for him to go back to France, to write a short note to her son.

"Monday. 1st February, 1837. 11 p. m.

"As I write these lines to you our drawing-

room is full of people. . . . Turgenev will give this note to d'Archiac who is being sent away because of this affair of poor Pushkin—he will travel as a courier. If you go and see him, you will be able to hear the details of this fatal duel. He will take a little book for you—a new edition of *Onegin*, very nice, I think. I am sure you will be glad to have it.”

The next day Madame Karamzina writes a detailed letter:

“Tuesday. 2nd February, 1837. 1 p. m.

“Yesterday the funeral service for poor dear Pushkin was held. His remains will be taken to the monastery next to their estate, in the Pskov Gubernia, where all the Hannibals* are buried; it is where he wished to lie. His Majesty behaved like an angel in regard both to him and his whole family. After the affair of his first challenge, Pushkin promised His Majesty never again to fight under any pretext whatsoever, and now, when mortally wounded, sent the good Zhukovsky to ask His Majesty's pardon for having broken his word. His Majesty replied in a letter containing the following expression: ‘If we are fated never to meet again in this

* Pushkin's ancestors on the maternal side.—*Tr.*

world, then accept my final and full forgiveness and my last advice: die as a Christian should. As for your wife and children, you may be quite at rest, I will undertake to look after them.' When Zhukovsky asked His Majesty *once more* to allow him *to act as his amanuensis for Pushkin*, as he had done for N. Karamzin, His Majesty summoned V. A. [Zhukovsky] and said: 'Look here, brother, I will do what I can for Pushkin, but I shall not write to him as I did to Karamzin. It was all we could do to make Pushkin die as a Christian should, but Karamzin lived and died an angel.' What could be more just, more delicate, more noble in thought and feeling, than the distinction he made between them? I should like to give you all the details, though I am afraid I won't be able to do it as well as Sophie, but I can think of nothing else now."

The information that Pushkin promised the Tsar when the affair of the duel first came up "never to fight again under any pretext whatever," and, wounded, sent Zhukovsky to ask pardon for having broken his word—is of the utmost importance. Up till now it was known—from the letters of A. Turgenev and Vyazemsky—that Pushkin asked the Tsar to

extend his pardon both to his second, Danzas, and to himself. But the exact terms of this request, for what exactly Pushkin asked pardon, had not been discovered.

Many years later Vyazemsky told Bartenev, Pushkin's biographer, that Nicholas I, meeting Pushkin somewhere after d'Anthès' wedding, had made him promise, should the affair come up again, not to take it up without letting him know in advance, and that Pushkin, bound by this pledge, had intended to inform him through Benckendorff on the eve of the duel, that he had written to Benckendorff and—did not send the letter. And that this letter was supposed to have been found in the pocket of the coat in which Pushkin was shot, and later preserved by Benckendorff's secretary Miller.

The truth is that this letter, addressed to Benckendorff and preserved by Miller, was written by Pushkin not in January, but in November, when he did send it. And that is how it came to be preserved by Miller—it could not possibly have been in Pushkin's coat pocket on the day of the duel. Owing to these discrepancies doubts have been cast on Vyazemsky's testimony. But now it is seen to coincide with the evidence of Madame Karamzina, writ-

ten down three days after the duel. Both Madame Karamzina and Vyazemsky speak of the same thing—that the Tsar had imposed upon Pushkin a promise not to fight.

We know that after the November conflict had been settled Pushkin informed the Tsar through Benckendorff of his suspicions regarding Ambassador Heckeren, and of his own intentions to demand satisfaction. On the 23rd of November, as has already been said, the Tsar summoned Pushkin.

We know, moreover, that in January—three days before the duel with d'Anthès—Pushkin again spoke to the Tsar on the same subject. This is known from the words of the Tsar himself, jotted down by a courtier.

It now appears that during one of these interviews the Tsar extracted from Pushkin a promise not to fight. Vyazemsky says, "Without letting him know beforehand"; Madame Karamzina, "Not to fight under any pretext whatever." The sense is the same in either case.

The question may arise: why did the Tsar need to exact a promise from Pushkin? Was it really that he wished to protect the poet from a duel?

In order to gain a true understanding of

this imperial solicitude, we will reconstruct this interview to the best of our abilities.

Pushkin, at court, in the Tsar's own sitting-room. He repeats of what he has already informed Benckendorff: the anonymous letter was the work of Ambassador Heckeren, and he, Pushkin, intends to announce this in the hearing of all. He does not seek protection; he gives warning that he will defend his honour himself, regardless of Heckeren's diplomatic privileges.

What reply could the Tsar give to this? Threaten him? Pushkin was not one to be intimidated. Pushkin was absolutely fearless. He had not been afraid to tell the Tsar on one occasion that if he had been in Petersburg on the 14th of December, 1825, the day of the Decembrists uprising, he would have gone out on to the square with his friends, who had instigated the regiments to rise and overthrow the autocracy, declaring Russia a republic. Argue with him? Pushkin would be sure to stick to his guns. The best thing would be to give him an assurance that measures would be taken, that he must do nothing without consulting him (the Tsar), "without letting him know beforehand," and, whatever happened,

not let matters come to a duel—"not to fight on any pretext whatever." "Give me your word," said the Tsar. "You can trust me, Pushkin." He must certainly have said something of the sort to Pushkin.

Having imposed upon Pushkin the promise not to fight, the Tsar thus robbed him of freedom of action in regard to d'Anthès and Heckeren and for the time removed the danger of a society scandal. But even if Pushkin chose to ignore the Tsar's request (and knowing Pushkin the Tsar was no doubt pretty sure of this) Nicholas' words would be accepted in society as proof of his endeavours to warn and save Pushkin. In either case the Tsar would appear as the sage counsellor, the peacemaker.

In a word, to demand from Pushkin a promise not to start a conflict with the Dutch ambassador was advantageous for the Tsar in all respects. Of course he had no idea of saving Pushkin. In 1826 he might still have cherished hopes of attaching him to the court, of benefiting by his pen and influence in the interests of the throne, but by 1837 he had finally lost all faith in this. And when Pushkin went out of his private sitting-room, anything the Tsar might have said was interpreted by Bencken-

dorff, who was present at the audience, as an assurance that the conflict was not to be averted, and that Pushkin was not to be restrained. It was not hard for Benckendorff to guess the true attitude of the Tsar.

Danzas, Pushkin's second, said later that Benckendorff supported Heckeren and d'Anthès and, knowing beforehand of the coming duel, had no desire to avert it. These facts have been long and widely known from Pushkin's biography.

We know how the Tsar spoke to the Decembrists. While interrogating them he displayed sympathetic interest and hypocritical concern for them. And immediately after gave orders for them to be put into irons and kept on bread and water. He was, consequently, perfectly capable of conversing sympathetically with Pushkin, while carrying on a very different kind of talk with Benckendorff, and there can be no doubt that Pushkin's enemies were supported by Benckendorff with the knowledge of Nicholas.

Now, however, we understand at last what Pushkin asked pardon for. The most honourable of men, he asked pardon for having broken his word.

This new reading of the death-bed request to the Tsar, a request which has hitherto been attributed to the feelings of a loyal subject, enables us to understand also Nicholas' reply (Madame Karamzina's version is practically the same as that found in memoirs already known to us). The sense of the reply may be summarized as follows: "I will forgive you your broken promise and look after your wife and children, if you will fulfil the Christian rites."

There was nothing for Pushkin to do but conform to these conditions. He had nothing but debts to leave to his family. Even those of his contemporaries who criticized him, realized this. "He fulfilled his Christian duties," wrote Madame Volkova, a niece of Vielgorsky, on the day of Pushkin's death, "because the Tsar wrote to him promising to look after his wife and children."

The Tsar inquired into the fulfilment of his demand—Dr. Spassky, from the bedside of the wounded poet, wrote that the priest had arrived in the presence of Arendt, the Tsar's own physician.

After the death of the historian Karamzin, Zhukovsky had composed the text for a decree, enumerating his merits and suggesting the

pension to be awarded his family. When Pushkin died, Zhukovsky asked to be allowed to do the same for Pushkin. In reply to this request the Tsar uttered the words quoted by Madame Karamzina; he explained his meaning more coarsely to Minister of Justice Dashkov. "What a queer fellow that Zhukovsky is!" he said. "He is pestering me to give the Pushkin family the same pension as the Karamzins, he doesn't seem to realize that Karamzin was almost a saint, and look what a life Pushkin led!" "He gave Zhukovsky to understand that neither the life nor the death of Pushkin could mean what Karamzin's had meant for Russia," wrote Alexander Turgenev in his diary. And Madame Karamzina after just writing the words "...immortal Pushkin," "...the loss for Russia..." agrees with the Tsar's opinion....

But the most important thing in this letter is not what is said in it. The most important thing is that there is not a word of the dying Pushkin having sent his blessing to the Tsar, wishing him a long reign, and exclaiming, "A pity I must die! I would have lived for him...." In a word, there is not a hint of Pushkin having died reconciled in his last moments to the throne and to God. Soviet critics, as a result

of immense and painstaking research, have shown that all this was the invention of friends, first and foremost, Zhukovsky. When Zhukovsky was subsequently reproached for having ascribed to Pushkin the loyal phrase, "I would have lived for him," he replied, "I was thinking of the fate of Pushkin's wife and children." One of Pushkin's first biographers noted this fact. But in reality Zhukovsky had other and more weighty motives.

During the days in which the crowd besieged the house of Pushkin, when threats against his murderers could be heard, and it was seen with such clarity for the first time that "literary talent is power," Benckendorff accused Pushkin's friends of desiring to turn the poet's funeral into a demonstration against the government, to exploit the agitation caused by the news that Pushkin's wound was mortal, and, later, that Pushkin was dead, for the triumph of liberalism.

Pushkin's independence of spirit, his high sense of national dignity, his former friendship with the Decembrists, his popularity, were interpreted in the highest circles of Petersburg society as manifestations of liberalism. The Neapolitan envoy informed his government:

“Pushkin was inclined to liberalism.” The diplomatic representative of Würtemberg summed up the demonstrations of universal grief and anger in those days as “the activities of the Russian party to which Pushkin belonged.”

After the 14th of December, 1825, when the Decembrists revolted against the power of the Tsar, Nicholas I never ceased to suspect the existence of some as yet undiscovered secret society. In 1834, in connection with the suppression of the magazine *Moskovsky Telegraph*, an intimate of the Tsar declared that the Decembrists were not yet destroyed, that there was in Russia a party which thirsted for revolution. The appearance in 1836 of Chaadayev's *Philosophical Letter* revived suspicions again, and the *Letter* was supposed to be the work of some secret society. The Tsar was ready to see the activities of a secret society in every sign of protest. And on the 2nd of February, 1837, three days after Pushkin's death, Count Orlov, one of the Tsar's intimates, sent him an anonymous letter received by him through the post. While this letter contained assurances of the people's loyalty to the throne, and was professedly dictated by a desire to avert

consequences capable of evoking national indignation, it overflowed with grief for the death of Pushkin, declaring that a premeditated, planned murder of the great poet of Russia had been committed.

This was quite sufficient for Benckendorff to regard the letter as a document proving the existence and work of a secret society.

Agents provocateurs reported to the Third Department that, in the crowd surrounding the house of Pushkin, threats against d'Anthès and Heckeren had been heard, that Pushkin's wife had been blamed, that while the body was being taken to St. Isaac's Cathedral Pushkin's admirers intended to unharness the horses from the hearse, that deputies from merchants and students would appear in the church, and speeches would be made over the poet's coffin.

This is why the coffin containing Pushkin's body was conveyed secretly, in the night, from his house to the court church. These were the reasons for the dead Pushkin being driven at a gallop from Petersburg to Mikhailovskoye, in the dead of night, accompanied by a gendarme.

Pushkin was laid in his coffin not in his court uniform, but in a frock-coat; it was held against

Vyazemsky and Turgenev. In bidding the poet farewell Vyazemsky had thrown a glove into the coffin; it was interpreted as some sort of symbol. The whole was regarded as the activities of a party hostile to the government.

Heckeren, who picked up his information in the salon of Foreign Minister Nesselrode, told his government that Pushkin's death had revealed the existence of an actual party, of which Pushkin had been the head. "This party may be called a reform party," asserted the Dutch ambassador, adding that the surmises of the Russian government were not altogether groundless, if it is taken into consideration that Pushkin was involved in the events preceding 1825. True, by such statements he hoped to bolster up his own reputation, and such information was extremely favourable to himself. There can nevertheless be not the slightest doubt that he communicated to his government what he had heard in Petersburg court circles.

At that time Benckendorff had not of course the slightest grounds for suspecting Vyazemsky, not to mention Zhukovsky, of plotting against the government. But the chief of police was not mistaken in considering that Pushkin had remained to the end an irreconcilable foe of the

autocratic police regime and the whole social-political system. There was no liberal party in Russia in the 1830's, but the political atmosphere of which Benckendorff informed the Tsar was constantly in evidence and acquired particular intensity in connection with the murder of Pushkin, proving—this time to an alarming degree—that the name of Pushkin was a symbol of national dignity, of the love of freedom and progress in the widest circles of Russian society. In the language of those days this in itself was liberalism. And Pushkin certainly was a symbol of liberalism.

By advancing the hypothesis of the existence of a plot, Benckendorff enabled himself to prevent any manifestations of discontent whatsoever (for they could now always be explained beforehand as the work of conspirators), and to take measures for nipping in the bud any activities of this alleged "demagogical party."

"You have made me out, if not a demagogue, then a kind of signboard of demagogy, behind which the secret foes of order are hiding," wrote Zhukovsky to Benckendorff, rebutting the accusations advanced against him. "They have done me a great honour in assigning me the first place," complained Vyazemsky to Grand-

Duke Michael, the Tsar's brother, whose faith in the existence of a conspiracy he endeavoured to shake.

This is why it was so important for Zhukovsky, Vyazemsky and Turgenev to prove that they had never plotted against the government, that they had no intention of arranging a public funeral for Pushkin, that this was not in line with their convictions. This is why they endeavoured to convince the government and the highest social circles that in his mature years Pushkin had been perfectly loyal and that he had died as befitted a Christian and a faithful subject. "Pushkin was not in the least a liberal, or a supporter of the opposition in the sense usually given to these words. He was sincerely devoted to the Tsar," wrote Vyazemsky to Grand-Duke Michael. And Zhukovsky acted in the same spirit. It was with this purpose that he composed his famous letter to the poet's father, showing Pushkin as repentant and submissive. This letter was circulated widely, and subsequently published in *Sovremennik*.

Zhukovsky was not alone in these efforts—what Vyazemsky and Turgenev wrote was also intended for wide publicity. When sending their letters to Moscow, Turgenev and Vyazemsky

requested the postmaster-general in Moscow to have copies made for friends. In these letters they endeavoured to throw light on the tragic situation of Pushkin, brought about by the base intrigues going on in the circles hostile to him. But they, too, repeated the lie about the poet's reconciliation and saintly death, considering that this version would rehabilitate them in the eyes of the government.

Thus it is that the image of Pushkin was distorted by the letters of his intimate friends Zhukovsky, Turgenev and Vyazemsky.

As for the communications of others of his contemporaries, who did not know Pushkin well, what they have to say of the poet's death is mainly based on unverified rumours and should also be regarded with the utmost caution.



The Tagil letters were written by persons in close touch with Pushkin and were not intended for publication. Therein lies their special value.

There can be no doubt that if there had been the slightest hints of the feelings spoken of by Zhukovsky in Pushkin's last words, the Karamzins,* religious and conservative folk, would not have failed to tell Andrei about it. Note how they hastened to inform him that the Tsar had behaved to the poet like an angel.

"On Sunday evening we went to the memorial service for our poor Pushkin," writes Sophia Karamzina, taking up the tale where her step-mother left off. "It was touching to see the crowd striving to make their last salute to his body. They say there were over twenty thousand persons there that day—officials, officers, merchants, all came up in reverent silence, with profound feeling—this gladdened the friends of Pushkin. One of those unknown persons said to Rosset: 'You see Pushkin was mistaken in thinking he had lost his oneness with the people. It is all here, but he did not seek it where his heart would have found a response.' Another, an old man, astonished Zhukovsky by the earnest attention with which he looked long at the face of Pushkin, now greatly altered. He actually sat down in front of the coffin and remained there motionless for about a quarter of an hour, tears streaming down his face, then

he rose and went towards the door. Zhukovsky sent to ask his name. 'What is it to you?' he replied. 'Pushkin did not know me and I never saw him, but I mourn for the glory of Russia.' And altogether this 'second society' shows such enthusiasm, such grief, such sympathy, that Pushkin's soul ought to rejoice if the slightest echo of earthly life reaches the place where he is now. More: a wave of indignation and fury is rising against Pushkin's murderer, threats are heard from that 'second society,' amongst the young, whereas in our circles d'Anthès has plenty of defenders, and what is the most outrageous of all, indeed simply incomprehensible —Pushkin, plenty of severe critics. These have not been a whit softened by the infernal tortures which during the last three months racked his ardent soul, unhappily all too sensitive to the stabs of the contemptible world, which, in the last resort, he revenged in his own person. To die at thirty-seven—and with such exquisite, such touching serenity. . . ."

When the rumour that Pushkin was in mortal danger spread over the town, it became clear to all that there were two camps in Petersburg: Sophia Karamzina formulated this very aptly in the words "our circles," that is to say, high

society, uttering accusations against Pushkin, and the "second society," mourning Pushkin, and giving extraordinary manifestations of affection.

No one, of course, counted exactly how many people came to bid Pushkin farewell. Zhukovsky wrote that over ten thousand persons passed the coffin in two days. Sophia Karamzina declared that there were over twenty thousand in a single day. It was said, besides, that over thirty-two thousand came to see the body, that during the last days of Pushkin's life, twenty-five thousand persons came on foot and in carriages to inquire after his health. The Prussian ambassador wrote in his *communiqué* that there were as many as fifty thousand persons of all classes in the house of Pushkin. However that may be, the figures certainly run into tens of thousands—standing before the house, coming to say farewell, flooding the Konyushennaya Square and the abutting streets and by-streets during the funeral service.

In that crowd of functionaries, writers, actors, students, schoolboys, merchants, military men there were—what was then quite unusual—numbers of common folk. Peasants' sheep-skin jackets appeared here, there and every-

where, and there were even some in rags. The whole town was agitated, aroused, grieved by the incident. Mukhanov writes that the shopmen and proprietors in the Gostiny Dvor* were all talking of nothing but Pushkin. Vyazemsky notes that "the muzhiks in the street were talking about him." A story by a contemporary writer, about a tavern boy who was anxious to know who would be "appointed for poetry" after Pushkin, has been preserved to this day. Everywhere angry talk about the Heckerens could be heard.

In wide circles of Petersburg society the murder of Pushkin was regarded as a public disaster. Foreign diplomats informed their courts that the death of the poet had aroused "national indignation," "universal indignation" (Bavarian ambassador). was considered a "social misfortune" (Neapolitan envoy), a "loss to the country" (Prussian ambassador); the Würtemberg envoy reports that government officials, who constitute a kind of third class in Russia, were creating an apotheosis for Pushkin. The statement that the popular feeling displayed in those days in Petersburg was similar

* A row of shops.—*Tr.*

to that inspiring the Russians in 1812, is attributed to the French ambassador.

In describing the last memorial service, Sophia Karamzina purposely refrained from saying that she had attended the carrying out of the body to the court church in the night, amidst twelve other intimate friends. The embankment was surrounded by gendarmes, and Pushkin's apartment was crowded with them. Sophia Karamzina dared not write this to her brother Andrei.

The death of Pushkin altered the attitude of the Karamzins to preceding events. His behaviour throughout those months no longer seemed to Sophia Karamzina either foolish or ridiculous. That which she had called a comedy was now seen in quite another light. The immense fame of the poet, which an unknown admirer had called Pushkin's "oneness with the people," forced upon all the realization that these days must be left to the judgement of history. But Sophia Karamzina still tried to see the duel of Pushkin and d'Anthès as a conflict between friends of her own. She would have liked to mourn over Pushkin without blaming d'Anthès. "I'm glad nothing happened to d'Anthès," she writes to Andrei. She thought

it would have been still worse if both Pushkin and d'Anthès had been killed as a result of the duel, for then Pushkin's death would not have evoked such sympathy. The role of victim always seemed to her to be the noblest role—"those who dare to attack him [Pushkin] are to my mind no better than hangmen."

"I saw the unfortunate Natalie on Saturday evening," she continues. "I cannot tell you what a heart-rending impression she made on me. A regular ghost—a roving glance and an expression so pathetic that it is impossible to look at her without a pang. And how lovely she is, even in this state!

"The funeral, or rather the memorial service, was held on Monday. A huge crowd assembled, everyone wanted to be present, whole government departments asked to be let off work that day, so as to be able to attend it. The entire Academy was there, musicians, university students, all the Russian actors. The church on Konyushennaya Square is not very big, so only those who had tickets were admitted, in a word, only the higher circles of society and the *corps diplomatique*, which was there in a body (one diplomat said: 'Only now do I learn what

Pushkin was for Russia. Up till now we met him, talked to him, and none of you (he was speaking to a lady) told us that he was your *national pride*). The square in front of the church was thronged, and when the doors were opened after the service, the whole crowd tried to get into the church. People argued and pushed to get up to the coffin and carry it into the cellar where it is to remain till it is taken to the country. One young man, very well dressed, implored Pierre [Meshchersky] to allow him just *to touch the coffin with his hand*. Pierre gave him his place, and the youth thanked him with tears in his eyes. How affecting is Pushkin's second, Colonel Danzas, his friend and comrade at the *Lycée*, known in the army as 'Brave Danzas.' Wounded himself,* his arm in a sling, his cheeks wet with tears, he speaks of Pushkin with the tenderness of a woman, making light of the punishment in store for himself. He blesses the Tsar for the favour of being allowed to stay beside his friend in the last moments of his life, and be with his unhappy wife in the first days of her profound grief. This is what the Tsar did for his family. . . ."

* During the Russo-Turkish war.—*Tr.*

Here Sophia Karamzina enumerates the favours of the Tsar, who had given orders for Pushkin's debts to be paid, for the Mikhailovskoye estate to be redeemed; for the widow to receive a pension of five thousand rubles, the children, one thousand five hundred each. Both sons were entered in the *Corps de Pages*.

"As well as this," continues Sophia, "a complete edition of Pushkin's works, which will no doubt be bought up instantly, is to be published at the expense of the State for the benefit of his children."

Sophia Karamzina regards these orders as the expression of the Tsar's sincere sympathy and solicitude. As a matter of fact, this philanthropy, while costing the Tsar nothing, afforded him a convenient opportunity to pass in the eyes of Europe as an enlightened patron of literature, and almost every single foreign diplomat noted in their *communiqués* from Petersburg at this time the generous aid of the Russian Tsar to the orphaned family of the country's leading poet. Nicholas deftly exploited the fame of Pushkin in his own interest.

"Fancy!" writes Sophia Karamzina. "Four thousand copies of *Onegin* have been sold in the last three days!"

How this slight detail conveys the atmosphere of the age!

"Yesterday [i.e., Monday, after the memorial service] we saw Natalie again, she was calmer and spoke a *great deal* about her husband. In a week she is going to her brother's estate near Kaluga, where she intends to spend two years. 'My husband told me to wear mourning for him two years,' she said. (What delicacy of feeling on his part; here, too, he tried to preserve her from the slander of the world!) 'And I think I shall best carry out his wishes if I spend these two years in the country. My sister will join me, that will be a great consolation.'"

That was Pushkin's will. On the day of his death, bidding his wife farewell, he said to her: "Go and live in the country, wear mourning for me for two years, and then marry again, but don't marry some good-for-nothing." The Vyazemskys heard him say it.

The letter goes on:

"And then we spoke about the anonymous letters. I told her what you said about them, and of your passionate indignation against their vile author."

"A box on the ear from the hangman—that's what he deserves in my opinion," Andrei

Karamzin wrote to his relatives, expressing the fear that, "if that scoundrel ever showed his face, indulgent society" would come forward in the role of his accomplice. In this he was not mistaken.

In those days the friends of Pushkin were always returning to the thought of the lampoon, now guessing, after the event, that it was this which had been the main factor leading to Pushkin's death, that the end of the tragedy lay at the author's door, that ever since, Pushkin had been "unable to find peace."

"Now," continues Sophia Karamzina, "I will tell you an amusing trifle in the midst of all our sorrows. Danzas asked the Tsar to allow him to accompany the body. The Tsar replied that this was impossible, for Danzas must stand his trial (they say, by the way, that it will be a pure formality). By way of fulfilling this last duty to Pushkin the Tsar appointed Turgenev as 'the only one of Pushkin's *friends who has at present nothing to do.*' Turgenev is leaving tomorrow with the body. He is displeased about it and cannot conceal the fact. Vyazemsky wished to go, and I said to him [Turgenev], 'Isn't he going with you?' Turgenev said, '*With me?* What d'you mean? *He isn't dead!*' "

Turgenev noted the same thing in his diary: "About Vyazemsky's going with me (at the Karamzins'): 'He isn't dead yet.'"

Sophia Karamzina finds it very amusing that the Tsar, without Turgenev's knowledge, appointed him to follow the body of Pushkin in the company of a gendarme. Turgenev submitted, but declared that he would go at his own expense and in his own carriage. In his diary he wrote, 'in evident mortification: "We are going together—I and a gendarme."' The irony of his reply to Sophia Karamzina applies to the Tsar's words: "has nothing to do" and could therefore be sent to follow the coffin. He was not asked to accompany Vyazemsky—"Vyazemsky is not dead," and the Tsar, forsooth, only ordered Turgenev to accompany corpses.



Alexander Turgenev accompanied the body of Pushkin to the Svyatogorsky Monastery where he was buried, and came back himself to the capital, but the excitement aroused by the

murder of Pushkin had not yet abated. This may be judged of from the Tagil letters, even those which do not deal directly with Pushkin.

On the 10th of February Sophia writes a few lines: the birthday of Liza, the youngest of the Karamzin sisters, had just been celebrated. Anxious to give her a real treat, Ekaterina Meshcherskaya had taken her to the Russian theatre, where Karatygin was splendid in the play *Matilda, or Jealousy*. Liza Karamzina and Nadine Vyazemskaya "were crazy with delight." Nikolenka Meshchersky, Ekaterina Nikolayevna's eight-year-old son, went with them.

"At first he liked it very much, but then he began to be afraid that *there would be shooting*, since the only thing he understood of all that was going on on the stage was that people were quarrelling. The Pushkin story, of which he has heard so much, had greatly heightened his imagination about everything that had anything to do with duelling, and he made up his mind that there would be a duel here too. He had to be taken home before the end.

"I can never tell you," Sophia continues on the same page, "what a mournful impression Ekaterina's salon made on me on that *first* Sunday when I went there again—not a soul

from the Pushkin family, who had invariably been there before! I kept thinking I saw them and could hear Pushkin's resonant, silvery laughter. Here are some verses written on Pushkin's death by some Lermontov, an officer of the Hussars. They are so beautiful in their sincerity and the feeling in them, that I want you to know them."

Here follows Lermontov's *Death of a Poet*, beginning:

*Gone is the poet—honour's captive,
He fell a victim to vile slander's tongue. . . .*

"Aren't they *beautiful*? Meshchersky took these verses to Alexandrina Goncharova, who asked for them for her sister, she eagerly reads everything concerning her husband, is always talking about him, *blaming* herself and crying. She suffers so acutely all the time that it's pathetic to look at her, but she has calmed down a little, and no longer has that mad, roving glance. Unfortunately, she sleeps badly, cries out in the night, calls for Pushkin! Unhappy victim of her own frivolity and the evil in people. . . . Odoyevsky's love for Pushkin is *most touching*. He cried like a child, and there

is nothing more moving than the lines in which he announced the death of Pushkin in his magazine. *Sovremennik* will come out this year as usual."

Sophia Karamzina copies Lermontov's poem in her letter word for word as it is in the author's manuscript. This is quite comprehensible, for Odoyevsky, who had the original, gave it to her to copy out. During the first few days after the death of Pushkin it was proposed to publish the poem in *Sovremennik*, but after the censor's reprimand to Krayevsky this was out of the question. Sophia Karamzina does not quote the famous concluding lines for the simple reason that Lermontov had not yet written them, and consequently had not yet been penalized and sent to exile. It was later, on his return from exile in a little over a year, that he became the guest and friend of the Karamzins, the pride and ornament of their salon. In February 1837 he was still "some Lermontov," he was not acquainted with them, though a round dozen of his regimental companions from the Hussar Guards used to visit them.

The few lines in which Odoyevsky announced the death of Pushkin form a brief obituary, beginning with the words: "The sun of

our poetry has set. Pushkin is dead, dead in the flower of life...." printed in the fifth issue of *Supplement to Russian Invalid*. The author has always been believed to be Krayevsky. Recently, however, surmises have been made that it was written by Odoyevsky. These surmises, as we see, have now been confirmed.

Before proceeding to the next letter a few words must be said about Lermontov's poem.

When the youthful poet finally realized that Pushkin had died as a result of intrigues in high society, that the Petersburg aristocracy had taken no part in the national mourning and continued to slander the dead genius, he added sixteen concluding lines to his poem, in which he called the court aristocracy the hangmen of genius, Russian liberty, and glory. He hinted at the revenge of the people, threatened imminent reprisals, when their black blood would begin to flow. These lines were written between the 10th and 16th of February, 1837. Copies of them were circulated as rapidly about the town as the poem itself had been. They represented the attitude of those who mourned the murdered poet as a friend. The lines were read in

the Karamzin salon. Here is Alexander's opinion of them, written in Russian, and dated 17th February:

"Guard-room. I have read two manuscript poems on the death of Pushkin—one by some pupil of the *Lycée*, quite good, the other by Lermontov, an officer of the Hussars, which seems to me beautiful, all except the end, which is apparently not by him.

"The public as a whole have shown more passionate feeling over the death of their great poet than I should ever have expected of them. As for *la haute société*, that mouldy scum on the surface of society, it deserves such profound contempt that it is not worth taking any notice of its discussions *pro* and *contra*, which, if this were possible, are still more idiotic than itself. However people may abuse the *public*" (here Karamzin goes over to French) "they are— in the true sense of the word—the best thing we have. It would be quite wrong to say, as is so often said here, that our writers have no audience. The contrary is more like the truth—our audiences lack writers. No wonder that in this dearth they enjoy a stuffed figure like Brambeus. They would like something better if they could get it."

The verses by the pupil of the *Lycée* referred to by Alexander Karamzin are the *Memory of Pushkin*, the author of which is still unknown. Alexander felt the difference between this feeble poetic response to Pushkin's death and Lermontov's glorious poem, but in his evaluation of the concluding lines of the *Death of a Poet* he shows himself to be on no higher level than the rest of his circle. Lermontov's fiery words did not please Alexander Karamzin, they are too bold and harsh for him, though he speaks contemptuously of society and with sympathy of Pushkin's readers, of the democratic section of society. And he explains the popularity of the works of O. Senkovsky, whose *nom de plume* was Baron Brambeus, aptly enough. Senkovsky, author and critic, and editor of the magazine *The Readers' Library* attacked Pushkin, together with Bulgarin and Grech. The opinions expressed by Alexander Karamzin show him to have been no stranger to the literary struggle going on in the thirties, and an admirer of Pushkin, Vyazemsky, Odoevsky.



On the 16th of February Madame Pushkina, with her sister Alexandrina and her Aunt Madame Zagryazhskaya, left Petersburg for her brother's estate in the Kaluga Gubernia.

"Natalya Pushkina left Petersburg yesterday," writes Alexander Karamzin. "I saw her the day before yesterday and said good-bye to her. Pale, thin, dim-eyed, in a black dress, she was like the shadow of what was once so beautiful, the poor thing!"

In all the letters about Pushkin's duel and death his friends conscientiously defended the honour of Madame Pushkina. This is quite easy to understand. Even those who were not intimate with Pushkin regarded his words as to his wife's innocence as his "last and sacred testament." Vyazemsky alone criticized her for lack of tact, finding in her relations with d'Anthès after his marriage much that was thoughtless and inconsistent.

The letters of Madame Karamzina and Sophia were not intended for publication, and were not written to defend Pushkin's widow against

public opinion. At first they both spoke of Madame Pushkina with profound sympathy, but subsequent letters—treating of their last meeting with her, and of her journey through Moscow, where she had refused to see Pushkin's father—are full of severe criticism.

This is true first and foremost of Sophia Karamzina's letter dated 17th February. She is shocked to find Madame Pushkina so "much taken up with her packing" before her departure, and not seeming "at all touched when saying good-bye, to Zhukovsky, Danzas and Dal, the three guardian angels who had surrounded the bed of her dying husband and did so much to soften his last moments." Sophia considers that "at such a moment she might have shown more feeling." It seems to her that Natalie is "not so sad as before." This does not surprise Sophia. She considers that Natalie "gambled with Pushkin's precious life" from sheer frivolity, and not "even from an excess of feeling, but simply from the miserable temptations of coquetry and vanity."

"Ah, poor Pushkin!" exclaims Sophia. "She never understood him. Having lost him *through her own fault* she only *suffered a few days*, and now the first excitement has passed, and

nothing is left but weakness and dejection. And even this will very *soon pass*.

"The sisters met to say good-bye, probably for ever, and this time Ekaterina [d'Anthès] did at last give some sign that she felt the calamity, which in reality lies on her conscience—she *cried*, but up till then she had been gay and serene all the time, *laughing* incessantly and talking to everyone she met of nothing but how *happy she was*. There's another block of wood for you—and a *fool* into the bargain.

"The trial of d'Anthès is not yet over, they say he will be degraded and sent out of Russia. Heckeren is preparing to leave and is personally supervising the sale of his china and silver in his own study. The whole town goes to him to buy things, some just to laugh, others from *friendship*."

A letter from Andrei came in answer to the one in which Madame Karamzina wrote to him of the last moments of Pushkin, and her own farewell of him. And here is the mother's reply.

"Wednesday, 3rd March, 1837, Petersburg.

"I knew the tidings of Pushkin's tragic death would be a blow at your heart. And you are not wrong in supposing that Madame Pushkina

is an object of sympathy and solicitude for me. I went to see her almost every day, at first with profound compassion for her great grief, but later, alas, with the assurance that this grief, though at present keen, will be neither prolonged nor deep. Sad as this may be, it is true. Our good, our great Pushkin should have had quite a different wife, better able to understand him, more suitable to his intellectual level. God will judge them, but however regarded this is a terrible calamity, and in many ways still obscure—he himself introduced a note of incomprehensible rashness. . . . Poor Pushkin, the victim of the frivolity, recklessness and unreasonableness of this young beauty, who, for the sake of a few hours of coquetry, sacrificed his life. Don't think I'm exaggerating, I'm not blaming her, you know, any more than one blames children when, from ignorance or thoughtlessness, they cause harm."

Sophia continues the same letter, giving much the same appraisal of Madame Pushkina's character.

"She has calmed down now," writes Sophia. "How well he knew her, he knew she was an Undine, not yet endowed with a soul. May God forgive her, for she knew not what she did!

And you, my dear Andrei, do not grieve for her—there are many joys and pleasures in store for her on this earth.”

It is impossible not to ponder over these lines. The Karamzins knew Madame Pushkina well, and their opinion is, of course, sincere and authoritative. Their letters supplement our conception of this woman, help us to understand her attitude to Pushkin and to his death, and to those surrounding him. Sophia calls her “silly.” Madame Karamzina writes that her behaviour after Pushkin’s death testifies to a mediocre mind and a callous heart, but it must be added that their bitter criticism of her had not the slightest influence on their further relations with her. When she comes back from the country she will continue to adorn their salon, where she once appeared with Pushkin and met d’Anthès, she will still be treated kindly in this house. And Lermontov will be the only one to shun her.

While there are no grounds for defending and justifying Pushkin’s wife, she was not the cause of his death. And in this respect the letters of Madame Karamzina and Sophia are less valuable than the testimony of Vyazemsky, Alexander Turgenev, Alexander Karamzin, Ekaterina

Meshcherskaya and Sollogub. The latter understood the social significance of all these events, mentioned the mysterious circumstances, the slander, endeavoured to penetrate into the secret of the anonymous letter-writer. Vyazemsky considers that certain leaders of society played a disgraceful role in this affair, that Pushkin was sent to his grave, and his wife ruined, by the town gossip and the slander of the Petersburg salons. Sollogub understands that in the person of d'Anthès Pushkin sought to deal reprisals against the whole of high society. But Madame Karamzina and Sophia confine the conflict within domestic limits. Concentrating on the personality of Madame Pushkina they make no attempt to divine the hidden—and main—causes of Pushkin's death, and say not a word about them in their letters to Andrei. Although Madame Karamzina does write that this is a terrible calamity and there is much in it that is still obscure, neither she nor Sophia connect it either with secret intrigues and the attitude of the Petersburg salons to Pushkin, or with the ferocious hatred of Count Benckendorff, the Count and Countess Nesselrode, the censor Uvarov, Benckendorff's stepdaughter Princess Beloselskaya, who hid her identity under

the name Princess B., and was called by Danzas one of Pushkin's bitterest foes.

Despite the sparsity of this information Andrei Karamzin in Paris understood the significance of events in Petersburg better than they did. "Congratulate Petersburg society from me, Mama!" he wrote. "It has achieved a glorious feat—by vulgar gossip, base envy of Genius and Beauty, it has brought the drama of its own invention to a close. Congratulate it, it deserves that!"

The universal sympathy evoked by the death of Pushkin gladdened Andrei Karamzin, and moved him to tears. "On the other hand," he continues, "what my sister writes of the strictures of good society, the higher circles, of the drawing-room aristocracy (God knows what those swine should be called!) did not surprise me in the least. They have been true to themselves. The murderer abuses his victim . . . that's quite in the order of things."

It is, however, astonishing that Andrei Karamzin does not extend his indignation with the aristocracy to d'Anthès, convinced that the latter had sacrificed himself for the sake of shielding the honour of a beloved woman, and had been forced into the duel. Karamzin could not

believe that after his marriage d'Anthès had gone on paying his addresses to Madame Pushkina; "I will be the first, with a clear conscience, and tears in my eyes for Pushkin, to extend my hand to him. He behaved like an honourable, magnanimous man, at least so it seems to me," writes Andrei to his relatives. "But to think that anyone can be found to cast bitter aspersions on Pushkin . . . the scoundrels!"

Sophia thoroughly agrees with him. In her own letters, sorrowful lines about Pushkin are followed by compassion for d'Anthès who is to be degraded.

This was the conception of honour in high society—a conception according to which the offender, killing the man he has insulted in a duel, is rehabilitated in the eyes of the public, while a great national poet and an insolent foreign *débauché* are regarded by people like Andrei and Sophia Karamzin as being on the same footing.

The news received in Paris from his mother and stepsister, however, does not explain to Andrei the secret causes of the disaster. And he writes: "Tell brother Alexander that I expect a letter from him. As a man he may hear a great deal."



On the 13th of March Alexander took up his pen. His letter runs to seven sides of the paper, half of which are devoted to Pushkin. We give the letter in full, it is the most important document of the whole find.

“Greetings, brother, what are you doing? Are you well? Happy? I was very pleased to have your letters, in which you express yourself so well about the Pushkin affair. You ask why we write nothing about d’Anthès, or, rather, Heckeren. I will begin by saying that I advise you not to extend your hand to him with such magnanimous trustfulness; I know him now, and, unfortunately, this knowledge has cost me dear. D’Anthès was an utterly insignificant figure when he first came here. There was an amusing mixture of ignorance and natural wit in him, but on the whole he was an utter nonentity, both in the moral and intellectual sense. If he had remained so, he would have been considered a good chap, and nothing more, and I would not have blushed as I now blush at the thought that I was ever friendly with him—but

he was adopted by Heckeren for reasons still unknown to society (which revenges itself for this by making all sorts of surmises). Heckeren is extremely cunning, and a *débauché* to a degree seldom met, and he had little difficulty in gaining absolute power over a mind and soul like d'Anthès', whose own mind is much inferior, and who perhaps never had a soul at all. These two persons, with what diabolical purpose I do not know, began persecuting Madame Pushkina so consistently and determinedly that, thanks to the easy relations between her and d'Anthès, and the revolting stupidity of her sister Ekaterina, they were able, in a single year, almost to turn the poor woman's head, and quite to ruin her reputation. At that time d'Anthès got a chest disease and grew thinner and thinner. Old Heckeren assured Madame Pushkina that d'Anthès was dying of love, implored her to save *his son*, then began threatening revenge, and two days later the anonymous letters appeared (if it is true that Heckeren himself was the author of these letters it was the most incomprehensible and idiotic cruelty on his part; and yet people who ought to know all the ins and outs, swear that his authorship is almost proved). After this came Madame Push-

kina's confession to her husband, the challenge, and then d'Anthès marriage. And the one who had so long played the role of go-between, of mistress (*amante*) and afterwards of wife—she, and she alone, gained something from all this, triumphed, and ever since has been half-crazed with joy; and now, having ruined her sister's reputation and perhaps also her soul, and murdered her husband, she sent a message on the day of Madame Pushkina's departure that she was ready to forget the past and *forgive* her all!

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“Pushkin too had his moment of triumph—he thought he had cast his enemy into the mud and forced him to play the part of a coward; but Pushkin, in his detestation of this enemy, whom he had long held in contempt, could not keep himself under control, indeed did not even try to. He made the whole town, all the visitors to the *salons*, the confidants of his hatred and his wrath, he was unable to profit by the advantages of his situation and became almost ridiculous. And since he never explained to us all the causes of his fury, we could not help asking—What does he want? Has he gone mad, or what? Or is he showing off his intrepidity? In the meantime d'Anthès, following the

advice of his *old* [two obscene words] of a father, behaved with remarkable tact, trying first and foremost to get the friends of Pushkin on to his side. He tried harder than ever to assure our family of his friendship; he pretended to be frank with me up to the last and was not sparing in outbursts of feeling, playing on the strings of honour, magnanimity, and was so successful in his endeavours that I believed in his loyalty to Madame Pushkina and his love for Ekaterina Goncharova, in fact in all that was most ridiculous and incredible, and never for a moment in the real truth. I seem to have been blinded, bewitched; well, however that may be, I have been punished for it by the most cruel remorse, which is still torturing me; I undergo its pangs daily, again and again, and try in vain to drive it away. Pushkin undoubtedly suffered when I shook hands cordially with d'Anthès in his presence, and I helped to torture his noble heart, for he suffered inexpressibly, seeing his enemy rise unstained from the mire into which he had pushed him. The genius, the pride of his native land, accustomed to nothing but plaudits, was insulted by a foreign adventurer, who wished to soil his honour; and when he, filled with indignation,

branded his opponent with shame, his own compatriots rose to the defence of the adventurer and began to pour out abuse on the great poet. Of course not all his compatriots abused Pushkin, it was just a handful of base individuals, but in his fury the poet could not distinguish between the howls of this clique and the voice of the great public, to which he had always been so sensitive. He suffered immeasurably, he thirsted for blood, but God, to our sorrow, judged otherwise, and the poet only crimsoned the earth with his own blood. Only after his death did I discover the truth about d'Anthès' behaviour—and immediately broke off relations with him. Perhaps I am being too harsh, prejudiced, perhaps this prejudice is due to the very fact that I was too well disposed to him before, but one thing is clear—there can be no doubt that he deceived me with high-flown words and made me see loyalty and lofty feelings in what was nothing but a vile plot. There can be no doubt that even after his wedding he went on paying court to Madame Pushkina, a thing I would not believe for a long time, but which glaring truths, learned by me later, forced me to believe at last. All this, brother, is quite enough reason to prevent you from giving

your hand to Pushkin's murderer. His trial is not over yet. After Pushkin's death, Zhukovsky took over all his papers by the desire of the Tsar. It has been said that Pushkin had long been dead to poetry, but many poems and short lyrics have been found among his papers. I have read some which are incredibly beautiful. A great change had come over the whole of his poetry—formerly its chief qualities had been an amazing lightness, imagination, variety of expression, ruthlessness joined with great feeling and ardour; but in his last works it is the powerful maturity of his talent that is striking; expressive force and an abundance of great, profound thoughts, presented with that exquisite simplicity of his; as you read them you cannot help being thrilled, and every line makes you stop and think, betrays the genius. In a whole long poem not a single superfluous insignificant verse . . . weep, my poor native land! You will not soon give birth to another such son! You exhausted yourself in bearing Pushkin."

This remarkable document, the best letter in the whole series, may be compared with what Vyazemsky and Turgenev wrote.

In the very first few days after the death of

Pushkin, resolving to discover for themselves the course of events and the motives by which Pushkin had been guided, they came more and more to the conclusion that he had fallen a victim to a subtle and complicated intrigue, that his enemies had ruined him. Summing up Pushkin's last conversations, exchanging surmises and suspicions with friends, Vyazemsky realized that infernal traps had been laid for the Pushkins, that they had fallen into a foul snare, he writes of the base and cunning attacks of two persons on the conjugal happiness and harmony of the Pushkins.

This opinion is completely shared by Turgenyev. Like Vyazemsky, he considered that the revelations as to the vile acts of Heckeren *père* were showing up Heckeren and d'Anthès as greater and greater scoundrels with every day.

In the letters to friends and acquaintances both Turgenyev and Vyazemsky endeavour to disperse the clouds of scandal surrounding the name of Pushkin, to give society true information as to the acts of d'Anthès, and, if only by remote hints, to give some idea of the forces hostile to Pushkin, ranged behind d'Anthès and of the circumstances impelling him towards his death which Pushkin was unable to overcome.

What Alexander Karamzin writes coincides with the statements of Vyazemsky and Turgenev; like them, Karamzin is convinced that the purpose of d'Anthès and Heckeren was to "soil the honour of Pushkin." It is in precisely these words that he speaks of the diabolical trap, the vile plot.

Alexander considers the author of the anonymous letter to have been Heckeren. He had been told that people who ought to have known all the ins and outs considered Heckeren's authorship almost proven. Who were these people? Who could have known all the ins and outs of the affair? Apparently he means gendarmes—the chiefs of the Third Department, Benckendorff and Dubelt. It is worth noting that N. Smirnov, husband of A. Rosset, writes in his memoirs that "the police had incontrovertible proof" of the authorship of Heckeren and that the Tsar was in no doubt about it. The critic Shchegolev may have contrived to prove that the "diploma" addressed to Pushkin was copied or even written in an altered hand by Dolgorukov. This does not remove suspicion from Heckeren, to whom the initiative certainly belongs.

We have seen that those who were nearest to Pushkin shared his conviction with regard to Heckeren. They heard it from Pushkin himself and as well as this they had seen the 'copy of his letter to Heckeren—after Pushkin's death the copy fell into the hands of Vyazemsky. Alexander Karamzin probably read this letter and was simply repeating the words of Pushkin when he wrote that d'Anthès fell ill and grew thin, and that old Heckeren had told Madame Pushkina that he was dying of love for her and implored her to save his son. We may recall Pushkin's own written words: "When, being ill of syphilis, he had to stay at home," wrote Pushkin to the ambassador, "you told her he was dying of love for her, you muttered in her ear, 'Give me back my son!'"

Admonitions were succeeded by threats, writes Karamzin, and two days later appeared those anonymous letters.

If these letters are compared with the entry in Princess Baryatinskaya's diary already mentioned in these pages, the sequence of events becomes perfectly clear. Madame Pushkina repulses d'Anthès and his advances, after which follow the persuasions and threats of Heckeren, and two days later the anonymous letters.

One thing is obvious—regardless of whose hand the lampoon was copied by, it was vengeance issuing from the house of the Heckerens!

Pushkin could not let this insult pass unnoticed. The challenge he sent to d'Anthès was only a part of the plan of action he had thought out.

“In a few days you will hear people speaking of a revenge in its own way unique,” Pushkin told Vyazemskaya early in November, when he still suspected the letters to be the work of d'Anthès. “It will be complete, perfect, it will cast that fellow into the mud.”

When Alexander Karamzin writes that Pushkin had cast his enemy into the mud he is of course remembering these threats. From his words it is also evident what exactly Pushkin meant by the expression “cast into the mud.” He cast him into the mud, writes Karamzin, by forcing him to play the part of a coward.

He is alluding to the moment in which Pushkin, announcing in November the coming duel (Zhukovsky's reproaches that he did not keep it a secret may be recalled), subsequently withdrew his challenge on the grounds that d'Anthès was going to marry his sister-in-law. After this,

of course, d'Anthès' betrothal was bound to look like a display of cowardice, like a reluctance to fight. And just when Pushkin was entitled to consider that he had humiliated and degraded d'Anthès in the eyes of society, this same society begins to heap attentions on d'Anthès, to pity him, to lend ear to the rumours started by Heckeren as to the magnanimity of d'Anthès and the sacrifice he is making for Madame Pushkina. It is being said in the town that Pushkin is forcing him to marry Ekaterina Goncharova (although Pushkin himself is laying wagers that the wedding will not come off), and the leaders of society are speaking of self-sacrifice. Only thus may be understood the words of Alexander Karamzin that Pushkin, "filled with indignation, had branded his opponent with shame," and that the latter "had risen unstained from the mire into which he had pushed him."

Now, when Pushkin is no longer alive, Karamzin realized the help he and his relatives had given to d'Anthès in continuing to receive him in their house as before, where he again had an opportunity of meeting Madame Pushkina and, by his very presence, of insulting Pushkin who had refused to receive

not only him, but his sister-in-law too in his home.

Alexander Karamzin considers d'Anthès' courtship of Madame Pushkina after her sister's marriage as Heckeren's worst offence. If this were true then there could be no question of sacrifice, chivalrous conduct, or love for Ekaterina Goncharova. And it was all this that d'Anthès, in his endeavours to win them over to his side, had tried to get the Karamzins to believe in.

His behaviour turned out to have been an ingenious game. Zhukovsky had understood this during Pushkin's lifetime, and entered in his notes a few lines exposing the hypocrisy and baseness of d'Anthès.

"After the wedding. Two faces. Moroseness in her presence. Gaiety behind her back (*Les Révélations d'Alexandrine*). In front of the aunt affectionate to wife. In front of Alexandrina and others, who might have given him away, *des brusqueries*. At home gaiety and great harmony."

Biographers have erroneously believed these lines to refer to Pushkin. As soon as this entry was freshly interpreted in our day, independently by E. Bulgakova and A. Slonimsky, it

became clear that the person meant was d'Anthès. It was he who had two faces after the wedding, not Pushkin, of course. It was he who pretended to be morose in front of Madame Pushkina and was gay behind her back. Alexandrina, Pushkin's other sister-in-law, noted that d'Anthès was affectionate to his wife in front of their aunt, but rude to her in front of Alexandrina or others who might have reported to Madame Pushkina. At the same time there was gaiety and complete harmony in the Heckeren home. It was this base conduct which exposed d'Anthès in the eyes of Alexander Karamzin.

Andrei Karamzin in Paris tries to find justification for d'Anthès, but Alexander now understood that d'Anthès had acted at the instigation of Heckeren, who was weaving a plot, and so he wrote: "Do not give him your hand."

Alexander Karamzin attributes a part in this plot a great deal more important than has hitherto been suspected, to Ekaterina Goncharova. In his narrative she appears as an aider and abettor of the Heckerens, as an active enemy. He names her among the number of Pushkin's murderers.

From the day on which Pushkin, receiving the lampoon, challenged d'Anthès, the aristoc-

racy ranged itself on the side of the adventurer and took up the persecution of Pushkin with even greater zeal than before. Alexander Karamzin is indignant. He appreciates and understands Pushkin's poetry, he calls his enemies a clique, a handful of base individuals.

"Do not think, however," he writes on the margin in French, "that the whole of society has turned against Pushkin after his death. No, it's only Nesselrode and a few such persons. Others, on the contrary, Countess Stroganova and Madame Naryshkina, for example, defend him energetically, which has even led to some quarrels, but the majority say nothing at all—which is just like them."

The poet's second, Danzas, asserted in his time that during Pushkin's lifetime there had been two parties in Petersburg society—one for Pushkin, the other for d'Anthès.

Alexander Karamzin is right in speaking of the existence of two parties, of the fact that there was a clique at the head of those hostile to Pushkin. Even the Grand-Duke Michael, the Tsar's brother, admits that Pushkin was driven to his death by acts of a base description, and the slanders of a clique of backbiters, whom the Tsar's brother dubbed a committee for

social salvation. It is well known—Professor Blagoi has written of it—that the Grand-Duke alluded to the salon of Foreign Minister Nesselrode's wife.

The hatred of Countess Nesselrode for Pushkin was immeasurable, and is as well known as her friendliness for Heckeren and d'Anthès, at whose wedding she acted as the bridegroom's "mother." Contemporaries suspected her to have been the composer of the anonymous letter—her fierce enmity for Pushkin and her baseness of character made her a likely candidate. At any rate there can be very little doubt that she was an inspirer of this ignoble document.

Even at the time when the Tsar Nicholas, alarmed by the manifestation of national sympathy for Pushkin, saw fit to demonstrate his coolness to Heckeren by sending him a snuffbox with his portrait on the lid—a sign that he did not wish to see him any more amongst the diplomatic representatives accredited to the court of Russia, even then Countess Nesselrode did not give up the Heckerens but continued to show them her favours.

In her salon the hatred felt for Pushkin by aristocratic society as a whole expressed itself

in the most open and shameless manner. Literary critics have plenty of material at their disposal exposing the sinister role played by Countess Nesselrode in Pushkin's destiny. And now we have the letter of Alexander Karamzin.

If, however, we are to place complete confidence in his statement that the Nesselrodes and a few such persons had attacked Pushkin, it would seem to follow that the forces of the foes and friends of Pushkin were equal. As a matter of fact, the attitude of the aristocracy to Pushkin was determined, not by his friends but by his foes, and it was not only the most rabid who by slander and backbiting led to the bloody consummation of the plot—he was ruined just as much by those who did not come forward openly, but supported d'Anthès during Pushkin's lifetime and justified him after Pushkin's death. Why, after all, speak of the representatives of high society, remote from Pushkin and inimical to him, when his friends—the Karamzins—did not take his side? The letters of Andrei and Sophia Karamzin are more eloquent than the speeches in defence of Pushkin quoted by Alexander. In the days when every educated Russian cursed the poet's murderer, they tried to find excuses for him. Noth-

ing reveals so vividly the attitude of society to Pushkin as the position taken up by his friends, who shared the views of this society. Were there many people in Petersburg drawing-rooms like Alexander Karamzin and the ladies he mentions?

The first of these, already mentioned in the letters, is Countess Stroganova. In addition to having been in terms of intimacy with the Karamzin family during the winter of 1836-1837, she was on friendly terms with Vyazemsky, and it is highly probable that her attitude to the death of Pushkin was influenced by Vyazemsky.

As for Madame Naryshkina, whose name we come across for the first time in connection with Pushkin, she is not to be numbered among the *élite* of the court of Nicholas. Her husband, Marshal Naryshkin, was in opposition to the government. The Naryshkins did not share the views of the court aristocracy. The fact that the attempts of Stroganova and Naryshkina to defend Pushkin led to certain quarrels is yet another testimony to the activity of his enemies.

"Why, of course high society killed him!" exclaimed Vyazemsky, drawing attention to the

fact that the slander and anonymous letters came to Pushkin from all sides. That Pushkin was killed by hostile society is also confirmed by Ekaterina Meshcherskaya. "In our gilded salons and perfumed boudoirs," she wrote, soon after the death of Pushkin, "there were few to remember and regret the brevity of his brilliant career. There were actually insulting epithets and reproaches defaming the memory of the great poet, going the rounds.

"And at the same time the praises of the chivalrous behaviour of the base flatterer and seducer, with his three native lands and his two surnames, could be heard everywhere." What an apt description of Baron Heckeren d'Anthès, French monarchist, the adopted son of a Dutch diplomat and the pet of the Russian court!



"Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky has been ill all these days, physically and morally," writes Madame Karamzina to her son on the 16th of March. "But worse than usual this time, for his spirit

is cruelly oppressed by the death of our incomparable Pushkin."

From the Karamzin letters it is finally established that Vyazemsky knew of the dispatch of the letter to Heckeren on the evening of January 25—two days before the duel. Pushkin himself spoke about it to Madame Vyazemskaya. Even if he had not read the letter, Vyazemsky must have realized that its consequence could only be a duel. And yet, as we see, he did nothing to avert the tragedy. It appears, therefore, that Vyazemsky carried out his intention of staying away from the Pushkin house, of which we learn from a letter of Sophia Karamzina. Did he mistrust his ability to help Pushkin? Or did he not consider himself entitled to interfere in an affair of honour, subsequently revealed to him as the cunning machinations of a couple of rascals? This we do not know.

But when the body of Pushkin was carried out of the church after the service, a huge form shaken by sobs was discovered on the steps. The individual was asked to get up and move aside. It was Vyazemsky.

He defended Pushkin's memory passionately, quarrelling with any friends who had behaved

disloyally on that day, or had shown signs of vacillation.. And none of the people surrounding Pushkin in his last years exposed the secret plots of enemies, the baseness of Heckeren and his adopted son so energetically as did Vyazemsky.

29th March, 1837. St. Petersburg. Letter from Sophia Karamzina:

"The trial of d'Anthès is over. He has been degraded to the ranks and taken under convoy to the frontier; in Tilsit he will be handed his passport and that will be the end—he will no longer exist for Russia. He left last week, his wife and her father-in-law are going to accompany him to Königsberg and from there, they say old Heckeren intends to send them to d'Anthès' relatives, who live near Baden. Perhaps you will meet them there. I'm sure I don't have to ask you to be generous and delicate. If d'Anthès did *wrong* (and God alone knows how much of the blame lies on him) he has been sufficiently punished. He has a murder on his conscience, he is bound to a wife whom he doesn't love (although he went on surrounding her with attentions and solicitude while here), his position in society is badly compromised, and, finally, his adopted father (who, by the way, is perfectly ca-

pable of abandoning him) has lost his place in *disgrace* and been deprived of the greater part of his income here. . . .”

Poor d’Anthès has been punished—he does not love his wife, Heckeren might abandon him, they have been deprived of their income in Russia. D’Anthès has a murder on his conscience, so it is necessary to be delicate with him, to stretch out a hand to him. Here it is again—the opinion of society. How these letters reveal the writers’ characters! Their attitude to Pushkin and to d’Anthès has divided the family into two camps. Sophia and Andrei pity the murderer, Ekaterina Meshcherskaya and Alexander denounce him, Madame Karamzina, while mourning for Pushkin, says not a word about d’Anthès; Vyazemsky stands up for Pushkin, blames the two Heckerens, blames society, while his daughter Madame Valuyeva hastens to express her sympathy for Ekaterina d’Anthès.

“The so-called *patriots*,” continues Sophia Karamzina, “have started talk about revenge, consigning d’Anthès to anathema and showering curses on him—this kind of criticism angered you in Paris, and we here also reject it indignantly. I can’t understand, is it really im-

possible to pity the one without showering all these curses on the other? . . . If you should happen to come across d'Anthès, be careful and delicate in touching on that theme with him. . . .”

The patriots who cursed d'Anthès were those who had stood in the frost before Pushkin's window, who were not admitted into the court church, from whom the poet's body was stolen, those whom Sophia Karamzina had called the “second society”—democratic circles, the middle class, who were then, in the words of Pushkin, “the only Russians.”

9th April, Friday, St. Petersburg. Sophia Karamzina writes again.

“Not long ago Zhukovsky read us Pushkin's marvellous novel *Ibrahim, His Majesty's Negro*. That Negro is so fascinating that it is no wonder he won the love of a court lady at the time of the Regency. Many features of his character and even his appearance seem to have been copied from Pushkin himself. The writer's pen broke off at the most interesting place. What a misfortune, Oh God, what a misfortune, one can't stop regretting it. . . .”

The manuscript of this unfinished novel bears no title. The title *The Negro of Peter the Great*

was given it by the editorial board of *Sovremennik*, the editorial board of which Zhukovsky, Vyazemsky, Odoyevsky, and Krayevsky remained after Pushkin's death. The *Negrô* was published in 1837, in the sixth number of the magazine.

A few lines from Madame Karamzina's letter of 11th May.

"My Easter present to you is a subscription to a collected edition of Pushkin, costing 25 rubles."

On the 2nd of June Sophia Karamzina writes from Tsarskoye Selo:

"The other day I got a letter from Alexandrina Goncharova and Natalya Pushkina . . . I had written to her before about Pushkin's *Ibrahim*, which Zhukovsky read to us not long ago—I think I told you at the time, for I was in ecstasies over it. Now she answers my letter: 'I have not read it and never heard of a novel called *Ibrahim* from my husband. Of course it may be that I know it under another name. I have had all the works of my husband sent to me, and try to read them, but my courage fails me. They move me too forcibly, too painfully, when one reads one seems to hear his voice—and that is so tragic.'"

Pushkin probably never read to his wife this unfinished novel, on which he began work long before his marriage—in 1827—and which apparently he never returned to.

9th July, St. Petersburg. Madame Karamzina writes:

“I wanted to send you *Sovremennik*, but Prince Pyotr Vyazemsky says he sent the page-proofs of it to Madame Smirnova. I hope she'll let you see it.”

The reference is to the 11th issue of *Sovremennik* containing the works of Pushkin discovered among his papers—*The Bronze Horseman*, *Scenes from the Age of Chivalry*, and some shorter poems. The number also contained an open letter from Zhukovsky to the poet's father, entitled *Pushkin's Last Moments*. And, among other items, some poems by Alexander Karamzin.

Madame Smirnova, who has been abroad since 1835, wishes for details of Pushkin's death, and every new line of his poetry. Vyazemsky sends her the page-proofs of *Sovremennik* to Baden, where Andrei Karamzin is also living.

To this little health resort, beloved of the Russian aristocracy, came Heckeren and d'An-

thès in the end of June, 1837. Andrei Karamzin met d'Anthès while out walking and . . . went up to him. "My feelings as a Russian struggle with pity in me," he explains in a letter to his relatives, reproaching Alexander for not wishing to meet Pushkin's murderer and hear what he had to say. "In this, Sashka, I agree with him [d'Anthès]—you were wrong."

Here is Sophia Karamzina's reply to Andrei. 17th July, 1837. Tsarskoye Selo:

"Your *peaceful* interview with d'Anthès made me very happy. . . ."

This "peaceful interview" is highly significant. Despite his wrathful tirades against high society, Andrei Karamzin was too much in sympathy with its ideas to be able to rise above it. He belonged to society with his whole being, and there is nothing surprising in the fact that by the forties he had become an adjutant of the chief of police. In the year of Pushkin's death this evolution had not yet been accomplished.

A fortnight after his meeting with the murderer of Pushkin Andrei Karamzin danced at a ball in Baden got up by members of the Russian aristocracy. "The sight of d'Anthès leading in the mazurka and the cotillon with all the

dash of a cavalryman, just as in the old days, made a very strange impression on me."

This information had its effect even on Sophia Karamzina, though here too she showed that she had not understood the tragedy of Pushkin.

"What you say of d'Anthès leading in the mazurka and cotillon," she replied, "made us all simply shudder, and we all said in one voice, 'Ah, poor Pushkin!' Oh, how foolish he was to sacrifice his beautiful life! And for what?"

This letter of July 22, 1837, is the last in the Tagil album which contains any mention of the name of Pushkin.



The circumstances which were so fatal for Pushkin were a great deal more complex than they seemed to the Karamzins. The undermining of the poet's existence had been going on for many years, and what really destroyed and humiliated him was his post at the court, and the

impossibility of breaking away from Petersburg society and writing in peace, the petty solicitude of the Tsar, the coarse admonitions of Benckendorff, the fight with the censors, literary persecution, the schemes of his former adherents, the accumulation of the *Sovremennik* debts, need, his material dependence on the court, his profound loneliness, the insolence of d'Anthès, the snares set by d'Anthès' father, the anonymous "diploma," the gossip and backbiting of spiteful society. Abundant proof of all this is contained in the Karamzin letters. Even those facts which have long been known from the testimony of other contemporaries are of immense interest.

And there is a great deal that is new. In the letters from July to October, 1836, there is evidence as to Pushkin's state of mind, his literary and publishing activities, his relations with d'Anthès, the double game carried on by d'Anthès with Pushkin's wife and sister-in-law. The November letters aid us to understand the source of the "diploma" and the motives underlying the sudden match. The first information given on the duel and death of Pushkin afford fresh rebuttal of the legend started by Zhukovsky. To the existing documents exposing the

plots of the two scoundrels has been added the letter of Alexander Karamzin.

Almost every one of the Karamzin letters contains some valuable details, fresh data, the names of persons hitherto not known to have been among the friends of Pushkin. Books of reminiscences and memoirs are written around arbitrarily selected facts, and later altered to make them correspond to the times, and established opinions. A diary, though the items in it may follow the course of events, is also apt to be written with an eye to posterity. But letters describe events, the consequences of which are for the greater part as yet unknown, the facts contained in them have not yet been interpreted. They give nothing but the primary reaction to the event together with details which the memoir-writer would have forgotten.

In their letters the Karamzins frequently write about the same events, but each of them elucidates facts in his or her own way. Thanks to this we see Pushkin as if through a stereoscope, in relief. And taken together the letters compose a regular novel about the struggle and death of Pushkin, a novel which is still capable of rousing the emotions with which his unknown admirers came to take leave of Pushkin.

Pushkin during the duel and his days of suffering, the farewell of Madame Kar  mzina, the procession of unknown mourners past his coffin, the crowd on Konyushennaya Square during the funeral service, Lermontov's poem, sent to Paris, the letter of Alexander—these and many other pages are extremely important. Such letters are of infinitely more value than any novel could be.

The Karamzins were not able to understand the significance of the tragedy, to guess at the causes of Pushkin's state of mind, described by them in such detail. Even those eye-witnesses who realized that it was not merely an affair of d'Anth  s, and obviously guessed at the backstage activities of Benckendorff and the Tsar's true attitude, could not get right to the root of the matter. In his letters to friends Vyazemsky harped insistently in those days on the melancholy and mysterious circumstances, hinted at the existence of some secret, complained that much that was dark and mysterious for himself and his friends in the affair still remained unsolved. But Vyazemsky could not bring himself to put down his guesses on paper—this would have meant giving names. "What has been said is the actual, though perhaps not the whole truth," he

remarks at the end of a detailed letter on the death of Pushkin to the Moscow postmaster-general. "It's a ticklish subject," he explains in a letter to Madame Dolgorukova.

And Vyazemsky was not the only one afraid to commit his thoughts to paper. Madame Smirnova, replying to him from Baden, hinted that she too could a tale unfold, and would like to exchange thoughts about people and affairs relating to the death of Pushkin, but "when we meet" . . . "I am afraid of written communications."

Any amount of reasons could be adduced to show the impossibility of finding a clue to the solution of this mystery in the correspondence of Pushkin's contemporaries. We have only to recall Pushkin's complaints that the Tsar reads his correspondence with his wife, or the anxiety which made Klementi Rosset ask Pushkin not to send his reply to Chaadayev by post.

All these statements and hints in the letters of Pushkin's friends relate to the time when even signs of sympathy for him were regarded as conspiratorial activities. This must be taken into account. There was a mystery, but the contemporaries of Pushkin could not disclose it.

Vyazemsky was not the only one to write of it. The Karamzins mention it, too. They too admit of the existence of reasons unknown to themselves. And even though, according to Sophia Karamzina, Pushkin told her sister Ekaterina Meshcherskaya all the obscure details of this affair, they still seem to her mysterious.

Though Zhukovsky had reproached Pushkin for telling the Karamzins everything, they themselves declare that the essence of the affair is incomprehensible and unknown to anyone. Pushkin is dead, but his story still appears obscure to them even after his death. Sophia Karamzina calls the anonymous letter the ostensible cause of the calamity. So they must have suspected that there were also secret causes. They suspect because the ostensible causes—d'Anthès' behaviour, etc., do not thoroughly explain Pushkin's state. Time will reveal more, wrote Alexander Turgenev.

In 1926 B. Kazansky, investigating the duel and death of Pushkin, advanced the hypothesis that the lampoon received by Pushkin through the post, connected the name of Pushkin's wife with that of Tsar Nicholas I. And that Pushkin understood this hint. This hypothesis was independently advanced by P. Reinbot, accept-

ed by P. Shchegolev and confirmed and developed by M. Tsyavlovsky.

The Karamzin letters neither support nor destroy this hypothesis. They do, however, confirm the main discovery made in our time by Soviet critics—the political nature of the facts surrounding Pushkin's death. The version of a domestic drama has been exploded. Pushkin was killed by high society, which sympathized with the insolent adventurer, supported the vile plotter, smiled at the tricks of the scoundrel, tracing in printed letters the scurrilous document. It desired the death of Pushkin and it prepared the ground for it.

And after all it is not so very important whose hand copied the document which poisoned Pushkin's existence. As well as Prince Dolgorukov, three other young men—Prince Urusov, Count Stroganov, and Opochinin—were fond of circulating anonymous letters in the autumn of 1836. In society this was considered highly amusing. The enemies of Pushkin converted this amusement into an instrument of murder. The Karamzin letters enliven our knowledge with a multitude of fresh details, and enlighten our ideas on the life of Pushkin amidst a society which ruthlessly persecuted him.

And because we understand Pushkin better than the Karamzins did, and know the results which the Karamzins were unable to foresee, this family conversation in letters makes an enormous impression. It evokes also bitter regrets, arouses and fosters in us the feeling of that boundless love which has long proved in itself the immortality of Pushkin.

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